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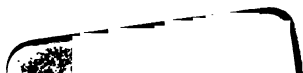
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LOYAL.

A Novel.

"Loyal je serai durant ma vie."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1872.

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LOYAL.

CHAPTER I.

ON a couch drawn to the window to catch the last rays of the setting sun, lay a woman with the stamp of death upon her face. She was not old, but on the fair white brow were lines of care and sorrow. The eyes, still bright, wandered over the placid summer landscape with an eager, restless longing, and the parched lips quivered with some suppressed feeling.

It had been a beautiful face once—a face that bore the unmistakeable mark of high breeding—a face that had once been marred by the haughty curl of the lips, by the look of excessive pride on every one of the chiselled features; but those lines were all fading now as she lay dying—fading under the influence of some strong feeling.

She was the mistress of all the fair do-

main that she gazed upon; yet it was no sorrow for leaving it that filled her eyes with unshed tears. There was one she must leave behind—one who was more to her than life or lands—one she must leave unprotected among the thousand snares that would beset his gay young life, with none to care for him, to watch over him as she had done. Even now his merry laugh fell on her ear, as he passed outside, heedless of the bitter pain in his mother's heart.

She turned restlessly, and spoke with fretful impatience to a man who stood near her, leaning against the dark oaken frame of the window, with his face in shadow.

"Why do you watch me so, Guy? It worries me to feel your eyes fixed upon me. Why do you not speak?"

"Was I watching you, mother dear?" he answered gently—and there was an infinite tenderness in the way in which he took the poor thin hand in his; "I was thinking of you, hoping you were a little better this evening."

"Hoping! there is no hope left. I am dying, and you know it, Guy. Why do you try to deceive me? There is none who will speak the truth to me if you will not."

The dark face that bent over her brightened just a little as she said that. Then she drew her hand away, and burying her face, she moaned out, "O God, to die and leave him, my own bright beautiful boy—to die and leave him alone! Who will love him as I have done?"

He left her to herself for a moment, then he spoke again.

"Mother dear, try to think that God knows best—and—can't you trust me just a little? Don't you think that I will care for my brother—not as you have done—no love can be as yours—but do you not believe that I will do my best? Leave your boy to me, mother; he is so much younger than I am. I will be as a father to him."

She looked up hastily.

"You, Guy? you who care for nothing but your pictures and your art—you who think such love as mine a pitiful weakness—you who are hard and cold and good, and have no pity for my boy's thoughtlessness and the heedless nature that brings him into trouble? You would soon forget your momentary pity, and be harsh with him. Ah, no; *you* would not take care of him."

Could she have seen the red flush that

mounted to her elder son's forehead, and the quivering of his firm haughty mouth, even she had not been so cruelly hard on him, who loved her with a worshipping tender love, as only strong firm men can love weak frail women—a love utterly unappreciated and passed over, in her idolatry of the younger, who all his young life of nineteen years had caused her nothing but pain and anxiety.

How often during his life had Guy Lawrence suffered as he did now at his mother's careless cruelty.

He retreated further into the shadow, and bit his lip to keep back the impatient words that might have pained her—and she went on: “How can I trust you? how can I feel you will have any pity or tenderness for him?—for, Guy, I have not been just or good to you; you have been a true son to me, and I have tried to love you as I ought—but, oh, Guy, forgive me, I have worshipped him, and thought too little of you.”

He lifted up her hand and pressed it to his lips, and his voice was low and unsteady.

“I know it, mother—your love has not been for me: you call me cold and hard,

you say I only care for my art. Did you never think that the reason I have lived so constantly abroad, and tried to find happiness in other things was because there was none for me at home? Don't think that I reproach you, dear, you could not help it; but I could not bear the pain of knowing and seeing every hour that your love was all for him."

As he spoke her breath came quick and fast, the tears welled into her eyes, and when she answered her voice was weak and broken.

"Forgive me. I have been a bad mother. All the love to one and so little to the other. Guy, Guy, listen to me once more—only once. Promise me to forgive all the wrong I have done you, and for my sake take him into your charge. You are good and strong. You have influence over him. When he would go wrong, guide him. When he is in danger, save him. You, who have so much, give him of your abundance. Let him never want for money. Can you do all this? If you could promise, swear to me that you will, I could die so peacefully——"

She clutched his hand with eager fingers. He knelt by her side.

"I will take charge of him. Trust him to me," he said solemnly; but she interrupted in a wild, excited voice.

"When we meet again," she gasped, "you will answer to me for him."

"Try to be quiet," said Guy. "If you wish it I will swear to you, mother, by my love for you, I will take charge of him. I will try to keep him from evil and danger. I will, if there be need, give my life for his."

He ceased speaking, and he was very pale—almost as colourless as the dying woman, who sank back exhausted; and in his voice and on his face was the solemnity of one who has just taken a great vow.

"I trust you—your life for his—your life for his," she murmured half-incoherently.

And then there was silence, and Guy Lawrence thought, and realized the awful burden he had taken on himself.

Did he foresee all the sacrifices it would entail? Did he, knowing the wilful, unstable nature of the boy he had undertaken to cherish more than his life, foresee the shadow that would be cast on his own future? Ay, even while he made the vow, he counted the cost, and knew how great it would be; and as he knelt there in the

summer twilight by the side of the dying woman there came over his face the look that might have been on the face of the Roman soldier, who, rather than leave his post without having received the word of command, stood there amidst the raging of the fire, "faithful unto death."

CHAPTER II.

GUY LAWRENCE'S mother had married twice. He was the only child by her first marriage ; his brother, Bertie Deverell, the only child by her second.

The first was a marriage of convenience with a man many years older than herself, who had worshipped his young wife, and died saddened and half broken-hearted by her coldness and indifference. The second was a marriage of love, with a young handsome cousin who had been known to her long years before. He died soon after the birth of his child, and the widow in her passionate grief found no consolation but in her almost adoring love for this her youngest born.

Her infatuation seemed almost excusable, for Bertie Deverell was a handsome boy, with the winning manners and bright though unstable nature of his father.

But for Guy Lawrence, Lady Caroline had little or no love, though in the heart of the reserved, shy boy there was hidden a depth of love for his beautiful mother of which she had never dreamed. It was always pent up, always checked by her coldness—this love which never found words till he, a strong man of thirty, bent over the couch where she lay dying. The hand of death ever throws down the barriers that separate the living, and too late she knew the love she had wilfully ignored.

Too late—but not too late to trust him with her nearest and dearest. Too late—but not too late to bind him with a vow which should mar his whole life.

Just lately there had dawned across his life a light that made all things seem bright—that made the world seem very fair and full of hope.

Guy Lawrence was a man whom other men called cold and hard. A man with an inflexible will, which seemed powerful to bend all things to itself, and a reticent nature, which took the form of intense pride.

He was not by any means a saint. He was a man beloved and sought after by

women ; yet not one among them could accuse Guy Lawrence of treachery or dishonour. Some bitter knowledge that he had gained in his first youth had made him intensely distrustful of most women. None of the high-born damsels who had sought him, as much from pique at the coldness of his manner as from covetous desire of his wealth, had been able to warm him into life, but many among another class, whose existence they would not recognise, but whose influence over men's lives is perhaps greater than their own, could tell of generous deeds, of kindness in time of need, of never hoped for sympathy, that they had received at Guy Lawrence's hands.

Bertie Deverell would have little or nothing but that which he would owe to the generosity of his elder brother ; for the mother, Lady Caroline, brought no dower to her first husband, and her second was almost penniless ; but Guy Lawrence was a rich man, and all the fair lands, the wide domains around Ellesmere, were in reality his own, though he had left his mother in possession of them until her death.

They were fair lands. Any man might have been proud of such a heritage. Miles

away beyond the park gates stretched the forest of Ellesmere ; in the summer time a sea of many-coloured foliage. How the leaves rippled, how the silvery stems of the birches seemed to catch the sweet sunshine and toss it up to the grim pines, the solemn poplars.

Here was timber, too, that would if need be fetch a high price in the market. But a Lawrence must have been hardly pressed indeed to cut down those grand elms and stately beeches. There was meadow land slanting eastward from the forest ; there was water gleaming white between the heavy-leaved trees. And the park was a picturesque type of the fair surrounding of many an ancestral mansion.

A broad drive swept round the front of the house, and twined for half a mile between green slopes to the park lodge. To the right and left of the drive undulated glossy sward, browned here and there by the gnarled roots of a clump of giant trees ; and near the house, to the right of it, and somewhat in the background, lay a parterre of flowers, yclept the garden.

The house was a great irregular mass of grey building, turreted and gabled, of what

particular architectural era difficult to determine, but as a whole the effect was grand. There was no veneer about its exterior. It was ancient enough to defy even the modernization of plate-glass windows. But inside—nineteenth century tastes—love of ease (and the wherewithal to gratify that love) had somewhat altered the character of the house. There was no severe stateliness, no grey grandeur, about the tessellated hall or the handsome velvet-carpeted staircase, both usually heavy with the scent of the flowers that filled the conservatories, swung in baskets from the ceilings, bloomed in jardinières or gilded vases, wherever such articles could be placed. There was refinement of art in the delicate tinting of the walls, the choice of every fitting in the rooms that had been last used by Lady Caroline Deverell. Pictures—gems that would make a dealer's eyes water—broke the monotony of lavender-toned paint, bijou mirrors filled up useless corners, every sort of lounge was scattered in boudoir and reception rooms.

Guy Lawrence sat in the library on the morning after his promise to his mother, thinking of all that had passed between

them ; thinking of something else also—of a fair, bright young face, of a merry, ringing voice, that he was beginning to care for more than for all the world besides ; of a wild hope of winning them for his own ; of at last finding one woman on whom to spend all the fierce love of his passionate, albeit controlled, nature.

As he thought, his heart beat thick and fast. He could not sit there any longer, on this bright summer morning. The warm, luxurious air seemed breathing of *her*, the radiant flowers seemed speaking of her, the beech trees waving in the distance were just the colour of her bright chestnut hair, the very birds as they sang seemed calling him to her.

He rose and rang the bell impatiently, pacing the room until it was answered.

“ Saddle St. Dunstan, and bring him round directly,” he said to the servant.

“ Please, sir, Mr. Bertie’s got him out.”

“ Mr. Bertie ! My horse ? ”

“ Yes, sir. James told him as he thought you wouldn’t like it, sir ; but Mr. Bertie would have his way, and he’s gone, sir, sure enough. I see him go across the home-park like mad.”

Guy Lawrence had turned to the window, and the man could judge nothing of how his master took the news from the set of the firm, square shoulders, and the motionless figure—only the voice was very cold and quiet.

“Tell them to saddle Wild Rose, and bring her round instantly.”

The man hesitated. “Yes, sir, and—perhaps you’d like to know, sir, whatever James could say contrary, Mr. Bertie would put the patent new bit on St. Dunstan; and James do say as he thinks it isn’t safe, sir, Mr. Bertie being such a careless rider, and that ’ere horse so wild like.”

There came no answer this time, and the man left the room.

Guy with his face still turned resolutely outwards, his eyes fixed on the distant scenery, yet seeing nothing, stood there till the chestnut mare was led past the window; and then he went out and rode away, bestowing scarcely a word in answer to the groom’s excuses and explanations of “how it wasn’t his fault.”

Rode away, at a swinging trot which soon broke into a mad gallop, with a fierce anger in his heart and an evil light in his eyes.

Careless of where he went; letting the mare take him as she would; careless even of the intense heat, till at length he came to a lane, called in that part of the country "the Green Walk." It was a long, winding lane; so thickly shadowed by the trees on either side—whose branches met and entwined overhead—that even in the fiercest noonday heat the shade was dense and unbroken. So little was it now used—being a bye-way, not a high-road—that the ground was green, and ferns and bright flowers sprang up under the horse's feet. It was a place in which to dream away a summer's day; one of those pastoral paradises that make you wonder how you could ever have enjoyed your morning's ride in Rotten Row. Guy loosened the reins, lifted his hat, and threw back his head to catch the breeze that murmured through the trees. The dark shadow went from his face, his compressed lips relaxed, his eyes softened as he felt the influence of the scene. He almost groaned to himself as he thought, "Who am I, that I should promise to take charge of that boy—I, who am so mad with passion at his first wild escapade?" And then he thought how absurdly he had over-valued

this horse of his, his companion, the object of his care, during so many cold sorrowful years, when he had had so little else to love. He remembered remorsefully that though he had fully realized the danger both to horse and rider when he heard that St. Dunstan had been taken out with the new bit—one that had only been bought to try as an experiment on a hard-mouthed, unmanageable horse—he had thought more of the horse's danger than of his brother's. Bitterly enough he said to himself, "Who am I that I should be my brother's keeper?"

A turn in the lane dispelled all these thoughts. Coming towards him slowly, with loosened reins, rode Bertie on St. Dunstan—and not alone. For by his side rode a girl, her bright head close to his, her merry voice ringing with his on the summer air.

What a pretty picture she made in Guy Lawrence's eyes as she rode towards him, with the trees forming an arch over her head; one or two stray sunbeams making bright glints of light on her chestnut hair, the beautiful moulding of her young figure so clearly revealed by her close-fitting blue habit. Such a bright laughing face she

lifted to his. Large saucy brown eyes several shades darker than her hair; delicate *mignonne* features; and a wondrously fair skin, that had been rather too much tanned by constant exposure to sun and wind. People, the envious and the fault-finding, were wont to say that Kitty lived on horseback; was always out somewhere, plucking the roses of life, ignoring its cares and forgetful of her share of its duties and troubles.

But they were hard upon her. She was only a bright, merry girl, with an infinite belief in the "niceness" of the world, and an unbounded power of enjoying its pleasures. A girl with a good, true, strong heart; a passionate, ungoverned temper; and a wonderfully fascinating manner. She had a way of looking straight up into your face with innocent, wide-opened eyes; and a little tender way of lowering her voice, that women called dangerous, but men found charming. A little coquette with a wilful, imperious manner—which sometimes softened into winning tenderness—and a loving woman's heart beneath all her careless gaiety. There was one accomplishment in which Kitty excelled. She carried the science of flirtation to perfection. It was

flirtation *pur et simple*, with no thought of what was to come after. Simply *pour s'amuser* ; these long bright summer days, what would she do without some one to amuse her ?

Bertie Deverell and she were almost like brother and sister, they had been so much together since their earliest childhood ; but she was going far to make his heart beat high with something more than brother's love, as she rode with him day after day under the shade of the trees.

The warm flush deepened on Kitty Lorton's cheek when she caught sight of Guy Lawrence ; and when he came up her little hand rested in his just a moment longer than was absolutely necessary. His low, *trainante* voice, as he answered the greeting in her eyes, sounded like music in her ears. Hitherto she had refused to hear the voice of the charmer, charmed he never so wisely ; directly he charmed seriously it was all up with him. Flirtation was all very well ; love up to a certain point permissible ; but marriage, bah ! Marriage meant ordering the dinners, scolding the servants, not having money to pay the bills, and above all, it meant loss of liberty. She would

marry perhaps when it was absolutely necessary, when she was quite old and she must choose between marrying and being an old maid — she couldn't stand that. Fancy Kitty Lorton, with thin, peaked features, a shrill voice, and a tabby cat! Better anything than that. And somehow all these, her ideas on matrimonial subjects, had changed since Guy Lawrence had come from abroad and she had renewed her acquaintance with him. There was a wonderful charm in the sun-browned, handsome face and kind, courteous manner, that made all things seem different to her.

Kitty watched him doubtfully, as letting go her hand, he turned to his brother with a face that darkened perceptibly.

"Bertie, you know that it is my wish that no one should ride St. Dunstan but myself. Any other horse you can have, but that one is mine, and mine alone—you understand?"

The boy's face flushed at the imperious tone, but he laughed carelessly.

"Don't look quite as black as that, old fellow. Mephistopheles himself would have the grace to hide his true character in the presence of the charming Marguerite. Kitty

will be frightened of you, and St. Dunstan himself must be my excuse. He's a dev'lish good horse, with just a spice of his master's temper, but that must be excused—in a horse."

"Hush, Bertie. You'd no right to take St. Dunstan, less right still to speak so. If I were Mr. Lawrence, I'd not trust you on him; your hand is too heavy. See! you are fretting him even now."

Poor Guy could scarcely bear to watch how the horse fretted and chafed beneath the boy's impatient hand.

"I have said my say," he answered coldly. "Pardon me, Kitty, for speaking about it in your presence, but I would rather shoot the horse than have his temper spoilt by bad riding."

"Bad riding!" shouted Bertie, thoroughly provoked. "Confound you, Guy; you may beat me at book learning and canvas spoiling, but I'll back myself against you or any other fellow across country. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, to kick up such an infernal row about a stupid horse."

Kitty laughed.

"'Could some fay the giftie gie us——'
Oh, Bertie, you don't know how savage you

look! And can you imagine Guy—Mr. Lawrence—making ‘a row?’ Why, it was yourself, you stupid boy. Of course he’s vexed with you, and of course you’re very sorry, and are not going to do it never no more.” •

Both faces brightened under her sunny smile.

“Well, I never supposed he’d care so much. I never thought there was any harm when I took the brute,” grumbled Bertie.

“You never do think there’s any harm, do you, Bertie?”

“Kitty, let me tell you lecturing does not come well from your pretty lips—they were meant for better things. We’ve grown ever so stupid since Guy came. Who’s game for a race? St. Dunstan’s impatient; I want to give him a breather, and there’s such a nice little bit of fence just yonder. Come, Guy, I’ll show you how well I can take him over.”

“No, no; it’s nicer here in this delightful shade, and safer too, Bertie. It’s not a day for hard riding—only for luxurious idling under these wonderful trees.”

“Then good-bye, Kitty; if you will not

come with me, I must e'en go alone;" and with a merry nod he gathered up the reins for a start. Guy sprang forward and laid his hand on St. Dunstan's neck.

"Stay, Bertie; believe that I do not speak for the horse's sake, but for yours. Don't try that place. I wont answer for what may happen if you do."

Truly it seemed as if Guy was right in distrusting his favourite's temper just then. He stood there chafing at the delay, every vein showing clearly in his arched neck, his nostrils distended and quivering, and a dangerous light in his eye.

Bertie Deverell laughed defiantly and shook off the hand that would have detained him—

"The part of Mentor just suits you, *Monsieur mon frère*, but I always make a point of not listening to good advice. Adieu! and au revoir, sweet Kitty," and waving his hand, with a merry laugh and a mocking backward glance at his brother, he rode away.

For a moment Guy watched the well-knit figure, set firmly and easily in the saddle, sunlight falling on the golden curls and back-turned boyish face, and then, as

the horse bore his brother swiftly away, his eyes softened, his features relaxed, and the anxious look faded out of his face. In its place there came one of passionate admiration as he looked down and met beautiful Kitty's consoling eyes.

He was seldom alone with her, and it was little wonder that, as they sauntered slowly through the breezy avenue, their horses' heads close together, his eyes taking in every line of the lovely face and graceful, lissome figure, he should yield himself up to the fascination of her beauty, and, forgetful of all else, feel only that he was alone with her. She had never seemed to him so marvellously attractive, he had never so fully realized until now how utterly this love had become part of his life—to make or to mar it. Do what he would he could not keep the fierce, passionate look out of his eyes. Even Kitty, who generally appeared so innocently unconscious of admiring glances, flushed with a momentary consciousness. She spoke to break the pause which had followed their last words.

“You love this horse very dearly—better than anything else in the world, don't you?”

Kitty was herself again—disdainful of the conscious shyness that had oppressed her for a moment. A coquette always, she never let a chance of flirtation slip. It would be a shame to miss such an opportunity as a ride *à deux*, with the chance of achieving a conquest over the hitherto unconquerable Guy Lawrence.

“I love him dearly; he was my only friend for years. You will laugh at me for indulging in sentiment, and think I am going to concoct a romance to cheat you out of the sympathy you ought to bestow on the heroes of your three-volumed novels. You wouldn’t believe me, would you, Miss Lorton, if I attributed to myself any very deep and romantic attachment for—my horse?”

“For your horse, perhaps,” answered Kitty, her thoughts still bent flirtationwards. “I sometimes think, Mr. Lawrence, if you had a sister or—or a wife, you would hold her ‘something better than your dog,’ but *not* ‘a little dearer than your horse.’”

He turned aside this innocent little shaft with a smile which Kitty thought meant contempt for her small coquetries, but which

was only dreamy. For it was in this man's nature to love, and he was realizing intensely all the influences of time, place, and this girl's presence—so realizing it that it seemed impossible to speak and keep back the words that rushed to his lips.

"Don't you believe then," he began, in a voice low and quivering with suppressed feeling, "in a love which would hold the world well lost for one dear sake; a love which would believe all things, endure all things, would feel that life itself was well bartered for one look, one word? Just now, as we rode along under the trees, I was thinking of that far-famed ride of Launcelot's and Guinevere's, when, as day by day they rode along together, he, gazing on her loveliness, drinking in her beauty, could not choose but yield to her fascination, and in the potency of the spell forgot everything—honour, truth, a trust betrayed—even the guiltiness of his love, and this his only excuse:—

"A man would give all other bliss,
And all his worldly wealth for this:
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.'"

He stooped his head lower and lower,

carried away by the excitement that was beyond his control. He took her hand in his—the little trembling, half-reluctant hand. Her eyelids drooped, and she quivered beneath his fierce gaze.

“Kitty——” he began again, hoarsely; and then she raised her eyes, her beautiful eyes, and lifted her head. One moment more and the full rosy lips so close to his own would have met his in silent acknowledgment, the heart that beat so strangely and wildly with newly-awakened feeling would have rested against his—when a wild cry rang through the clear summer air, and they started apart with a sudden awakening to the outer world. The girl’s face blanched with an overwhelming terror, but it was scarcely whiter than Guy’s, for as the cry fell on his ear he felt what had happened. Without a word he spurred his mare in the direction from which it had come, and in a few moments reached the scene of the catastrophe.

Near a broken fence, splinters of wood scattered on the road, stood St. Dunstan, quivering in every limb, with blood trickling from two deep gashes on his forelegs, and from a jagged wound in his chest, where a

stake from the fence had penetrated. By his side, covered with dust, half stunned by the fall; stood Bertie Deverell, with sullen, downcast face and trembling lips.

Those two who saw Guy Lawrence's face never forgot the look of blind fury which for a moment convulsed it, transfiguring every feature, as he realized the ruin which had been wrought. For a minute there was silence; then he spoke, but his voice was hoarse and broken.

"Go away, and leave me."

Bertie moved slowly away through the gap in the fence and hid himself out of sight, throwing himself on the ground and burying his face in the long grass. Kitty, frightened and distressed, stooped and gathered up the reins of the chestnut mare, which Guy had left to her own devices, and led her away to tie her to a tree. Then she came slowly back, and drew up her own horse close to where Guy stood, and looked down on him sorrowfully, with a pitiful yearning in her face and tears in her great eyes. She was half afraid to speak, for he stood there without moving, his face hidden on St. Dunstan's glossy neck. The silence was so terrible that at last she could bear it

no longer, so she stooped and laid her hand on his shoulder—

“Mr. Lawrence; Guy — please, please don’t grieve so. Wont you speak to me? Mayn’t I try to comfort you?” And then she sobbed outright.

He lifted his head—his face looked worn and haggard, and there was a miserable hopelessness in the heavy eyes that was not all sorrow for the horse.

“Don’t cry, Kitty,” he said, lifting his eyes to the fair face that had lately been so near his own; “unless you cry for St. Dunstan. I’m not worth such tears as yours. Where is Bertie? I can’t speak to him just for the present. Will you go to him and ask him if he will see you home? He can have the mare; I must lead St. Dunstan.”

He took her hand and pressed it to his lips—a spark of light came into his face—then he dropped it, and taking up the reins lifted his hat and turned homewards.

Kitty remained there watching till the last outline of man and horse disappeared in the distance, and then she turned with a heavy sigh and went to look for Bertie.

Two hours later Guy Lawrence looking

from his window saw his brother coming slowly across the home-park on foot, and he turned and went down to the terrace to meet him. There was a half-frightened, half-sullen look on the boy's face, and in the very manner in which he walked slowly and reluctantly homewards. He could not avoid meeting Guy, but he was passing him with averted eyes and hurried steps. Guy laid his hand on his arm.

"Bertie——" he began, and then he stopped.

"Oh, Guy, Guy, I didn't mean—indeed I couldn't help it."

"Stop, Bertie, I was going to say if I was angry you must forgive me. I had cause enough, you know, but I had no right to be harsh. If I said anything, you must try and forget it."

The younger brother looked up surprised. He little knew the cause of all this: how, walking home from the scene of the accident, Guy had thought of his vow; remembered how he had promised never to be harsh to the boy, how he had meant to try and win his confidence, and use his influence over him; and confessed to himself sadly enough that he had begun badly.

"Guy—I never thought——" stammered Bertie. "Oh, Guy, how is St. Dunstan?"

"Dead."

"Dead?" He looked eagerly, but the grave face before him never changed. "How? When?"

"I shot him. Did you think I would let him live like that?" And Guy Lawrence turned and leant against one of the columns of the portico, and hid his face from his brother, scarcely heeding the torrent of words, half of excuse, half of sorrow, till there came a pause, and then he lifted his head.

"If indeed, Bertie, you do think you owe me some amends, if you would do something for my sake, there is but one thing I would wish or ask of you. No," he said, kindly, laying his hand on his brother's shoulder, as Bertie would have interrupted him with eager protestations, "it is not for myself. Bertie, you know—no you do not, cannot know—how much your mother loves you. Do you ever think how much pleasure you could give her by a little sacrifice of your own enjoyments? One hour that you spend by her bedside does her more good than all the medicine

in the world. Will you try to be a little more with her? You are young and know so little of death. You do not know how bitterly you may reproach yourself when it is too late."

The boy's face saddened at the earnest tone.

"I will go now, Guy," he said, quietly. "Poor *Madre*, she does love me." And he turned and went into the house.

But the other remained, and gazing into the twilight of the summer evening, with sad weariful eyes, realized in his heart that he had already paid part of the cost in coin that his heart held dear.

That night at midnight there was a cry raised, and the Angel of Death spread his dark shadow over the house, and over the chamber where the sick woman lay.

The brothers were there, summoned in haste; Bertie sobbing convulsively, with his face hidden in the bed-clothes; Guy with gentle, womanly care, supporting the frail attenuated figure of the dying woman, his face set and white and a world of sorrow in his deep watchful eyes. The feeble hand wandered restlessly over the clothes. Guy gently took it in his, and knowing

what it sought laid it on the boy's golden curls.

The breath came in quick, short gasps, with hurried words unintelligible to the anxious listeners ; and then the glazing eyes closed, but opening once again fixed themselves first on Guy, then turning from him they sought the other son, better loved even to the end. And the words came out gaspingly—

“ Your promise, Guy. My boy—your life for his—your——”

And then she died ; and Guy laid the world-weary head gently down, and rushed from the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE morning after the funeral the two brothers were together in the library of Erlesmere. It was a fine old-fashioned room. As eloquent of wealth and taste as were the other rooms in the house, it had about it that atmosphere in which they were wanting. True, rich red curtains shrouded the wide window, and some massive bronzes stood out in artistic relief upon the grey marble of the mantelpiece; but here were no luxurious sofas, no sleep-inviting lounges sweet to sybarite eyes. Quaint oaken chairs, straight-backed and formal, stood in the few niches that were not filled by bookcases. Bookcases everywhere, and books—not book-covers, if you please, bought up at auctions to supply empty shelves—but such books as are meat and drink to those few in this noisy, hurrying world to whom life is knowledge—books that stood in tempting

rows before one pair of earnest eyes ever eager to devour their contents until this day.

But on this day, though Guy sat at the table with many papers scattered around him, his eyes were full of thoughts that wandered far away, and his head rested dreamily on his hand. A softening light came now and then into those deep grey eyes, and that grave mouth, so hidden by the heavy drooping moustache and crisp bronze beard, moved with a half-smile as the brightness of a new hope dispersed for a moment the clouds of anxious forethought—a hope that had become almost a certainty on that day of St. Dunstan's death—a hope that broke with dazzling light over the life that had so lacked completeness—this hope a woman's love; not only a woman's love—other women had loved Guy Lawrence—but the love of the one woman whom he desired above all else in the world.

Bertie lounged on the low seat formed by the window-sill, pulling the long silky ears of a Skye terrier, with lazy weariness depicted in every limb and on his handsome young face.

Looking from one to the other you could

not fail to note the marked difference in these two who were the children of one mother. In spite of the strong similarity of form and feature—the same height, the same broad shoulders and well-cut features in each—in their individuality they could scarcely be more dissimilar. Bertie, with his bright smile and winning, soft blue eyes, was far the handsomer of the two; but Guy, with his quiet, grave manners and firm mouth, gave the impression of strength—strength moral and physical—for good or evil.

And the small world round Erlesmere, which knew little, but busied itself much about the concerns of the Squire, as is usual with worlds great or small, believed the worst, and gave Guy Lawrence credit for much of the evil and little of the good. It was enough for these small village folk that he had been away so long in “furrin parts.” Guy was disliked as a stranger and an alien amongst them, and Bertie was first favourite in every heart. Not quite in every heart, though. There was one young girl who had been brought in close contact with him all her young life—who loved him dearly—thought she loved him better than

any, until one pair of dark passionate eyes looking into hers taught her how to love under the trees that summer morning.

Guy broke the silence, speaking abruptly. "Bertie, you know that mother has left me your sole guardian?"

"Little enough to be guardian of," answered Bertie. "I'm not speaking of myself—only of the property, this valuable property that I can call mine. How much is it—two thou? Better hand it over, old fellow, and let me put the pot on Lady Betsy for the Leger!"

"Bertie, don't speak as if you would, even in the smallest thing, blame her. Poor mother! you know she left you all the money she had the control of—every farthing. All that was hers is yours—the estate and all the money she possessed in her lifetime, was my father's, and is mine now, and all that is mine is yours; you don't need that I should tell you that; you don't think that of all this money, for which I care so little, I should grudge you your share?—you, my mother's favourite boy."

Guy's voice shook, and Bertie started up.

"Hush, Guy! I'm not such a ruffian as to think you anything but what you are—the

best of good fellows—or to blame her. But it is hard lines to be brought up like this—more like a prince than a pauper, and then to be told when you want to make a start in life that you are the happy possessor of a paltry sum—not enough to keep you in cigarettes and lavender kids, by Jove! It's no good mincing the matter, my real income is—nothing a year. I cannot dig: I'm not ashamed to beg, but it wouldn't pay, so I must either starve or be dependent on you. I don't know which I prefer."

He shook the dog off his knees, and sent it away with an angry kick, as he raised himself from his lounging attitude. Guy had risen too, and was pacing up and down the room with his arms crossed, a way that he had when he was vexed. He stopped opposite his brother, and looked at him.

"You don't know which you prefer? When I asked you to share with me all that I had, did I make the request seem so like charity that you must take offence at it? We have had enough of this, Bertie. No need to think who the money belongs to so long as we both have enough. When you go back to college you will receive your usual allowance. When you come of age,

two years hence, you will choose what profession you please, and do in all things as you would if your mother had lived. It wasn't that I meant when I spoke of being your guardian. She not only left me your sole guardian legally, but she left you to my care as the dearest treasure she had to leave."

Guy paused, but the kindness, even tenderness of his tone, awakened no response.

"Much good may the treasure do you," Bertie answered, with a half laugh. "I advise you to abandon all grand notions of taking care of me. I shall go to the bad my own way, and a dev'lish good way it will be. I had but one idea, of turning over a new leaf, living a sober, honest sort of life, but that idea has been knocked on the head."

He threw himself back on his low seat, and taking an embroidered case from his pocket twirled a cigarette between his lazy, white fingers. Guy came near him eagerly.

"What was that one idea? Was it anything I can help you in? There is nothing, nothing in the whole world I would not do, would not give up to help you for your

mother's sake. Speak, Bertie ; it will be hard indeed if I can't help you."

The earnestness of his tone arrested his brother's attention.

" It's no good telling you now, Guy, and then—you'd only laugh at me—say I was too young, and it was all boyish folly ; and besides, what's the good of talking ? A fellow can't live, much less marry, on—how much is it a year ?"

" Marry !"

The tone and all the amazement it expressed roused all Bertie's slumbering impatience.

" Yes, marry," he answered, angrily ; " and why the deuce shouldn't I marry as much as you or any other fellow ? I'm of age in less than two years. You can't act the part of stern parent and forbid the banns then. I'd marry her, and not ask your consent or any one else's, if I wasn't a beggar, or worse—a pauper, subsisting on your charity."

Bertie sank back on his low seat. Argument was not his strong point.

Guy passed over the injustice of his last words. A terrible fear possessed him that his young brother had got into an entangle-

ment with some pretty dairymaid with rosy cheeks, one of the tenant's daughters : or worse still, with one of the second-rate actresses at the little provincial theatre. He scarcely dared ask for fear the doubt should become a certainty.

"Who is it?" he said at length. "It seems ridiculous to talk of marriage and you in the same breath; but an engagement might keep you steady, might be a good thing, if—Bertie, *is* it any one I could approve of?"

"Approve of! *Juste ciel!* What are we that we should aspire to so great and unmerited a blessing as your approbation or vice versâ. Who are you that we should need to ask it? You remind me," he drawled, holding his cigarette daintily in the air, and looking at it with half-closed eyes, "of the fellow in the play who does the old uncle and that sort of thing, you know, folds his hands over everybody's heads and gives everybody his blessing. I always thought that was a mistake. If I had a rich uncle I'd say 'Hand over the tin, old chap, and keep the blessing for yourself; you may want it.'"

Guy shook himself impatiently.

"Is this a time to make a fool of yourself? Who is she?"

"Who is she? That's what the old French party—what's his name?—used to ask when he heard any one had come to grief, 'Who is she?' What was that fellow's name, by-the-bye? There were such a number of French chaps who were always saying witty things. I never can remember all their names—was it Rochefoucauld? Who is she? Why, she's the person who loves me, and I'm the person who love her."

Guy turned away impatiently.

"I told you I would help you if I could, but I'm not going to waste my time listening to your nonsense. If you can't speak sense we'll let the thing alone."

"Good Heavens! Guy, how unreasonable you are; how can you expect me to talk sense? Don't you see the whole thing is nonsense—that is, nonsense to you. You'd call it ridiculous of me to love her, ridiculous of me to want to marry her; but I do love her with all my heart and soul, and I do want to marry her—only I can't." In spite of his jesting manner the words sounded sincere, and his face flushed with a warmth

he could not hide under all his affected indifference.

Guy laid his hand on his shoulder and looked earnestly into his face.

“ If you only would be serious, Bertie ; if I could only tell what you mean, God knows I would help you if I could.”

The boy threw himself from his lounging attitude and looked up into his brother's grave face, and there was an eager expression in his eyes as he answered

“ Oh, Guy, would you help us? could you? I've no right to be too proud to take your help, and all my life hangs on it—my happiness—for I love her so much, you cannot tell how much ; and I don't mean it for a threat, Guy, but I know I shall go to the bad if I lose her. It's only the thought of her that keeps me from other things—you know, things that the fellows at college think nothing of, but which she would despise me for.”

There was a true ring in his voice that dispelled Guy's doubts, but still no thought of the fatal truth flashed through his mind ; only, his own love taught him that the true love for a pure woman would be the saving of the boy, and there was

double earnestness in the voice which answered.

"Tell me how I can help you. I will, if I can—no need to tell you that. Tell me who it is that you love, and how I can help you."

"Who it is I love? Why, surely, surely, Guy, you must know," he answered, with a little laugh, turning towards the window, half ashamed of owning his folly—half afraid of ridicule.

It was well he did so—well he did not see the sudden ghastly pallor of his brother's face—the drawn, quivering lips, which would not frame the question they dared not ask.

"We have been so much together," Bertie went on. "There is no engagement; I have never asked her to be my wife, but I have thought of it since the day we first parted, when I went to college. I don't mean to be vain, but she knows I love her, and, I believe, I am sure that if I am ever rich enough to ask her to have me, she will. Oh, Guy, she is so beautiful—my beautiful Kitty!"

He knew it before—he was sure of it before the last word was spoken, the last un-

mistakeable word—her name. That last word stunned him; he hardly knew or felt anything after that. He never moved from where he stood, resting against the marble mantelpiece with folded arms and fingers tightly clenched, but on his set, white face—white under the bronzing of many sultry suns—was the look of a man who had just received his death-blow. He did not need to speak. He could not trust his voice to utter one syllable, but he heard as a man lying half asleep, half awake, hears in his dreams all the rhapsodies on her beauty, all the extravagant professions of love for her—for *her* whom his heart held dearer than life itself.

At last Bertie paused, and then Guy spoke, but so low, so slowly, lest his voice should tremble, should sound as it did in his own ears, so far away, as if it was some one else, not he, Guy Lawrence, who was speaking, asking the question that should put the seal to his own death warrant.

“Have you any reason to believe that she loves you?”

“Reason? Good Heavens! would you have me doubt her? She herself makes no secret of it. Look at the difference in her behaviour to you and to me, for instance.

She calls me Bertie, dear Bertie ; she treats you with reserve and formality, as she would a stranger ; but to me, doesn't she openly show her preference, doesn't she care to be with me, and say so ? Oh, and in a thousand little ways I can tell she loves me, though it's hard to explain."

Guy looked up. The suddenness of the blow had for the moment numbed both heart and mind, he could not think or feel acutely, but now one ray of hope brought him back to life. Hope—could he dare hope that his brother's argument was a false one — that the very things Bertie quoted were signs that she loved him only in an openly acknowledged sisterly sort of way, very different from the shy consciousness he felt she would show to one she really loved ? Could he dare hope that his young brother's life—that life which he had vowed to guard and shield and make his chiefest care, should become waste for want of that love which should make his own so perfect ? Could he take this happiness for himself and leave his brother without ? For, after the first shock was passed, he, remembering all that had passed, could not deceive himself ; he believed that should he

choose he could win her for himself, that should he enter the lists in fair and open rivalry, his brother would have no chance against him. In this short time of intensest suffering he fully realized that if he gave her up it would be of his own free will; he remembered the look in her eyes, the flush on her cheeks when he had last looked down on her sweet, drooping face, and felt that his strength was all unequal to the trial—he could not do this thing and live—he could not make himself for ever dishonoured in the eyes of the girl he loved so dearly. He knew, and this was the last, worst pang of all, that should he leave her now, having said so much, looked so much, without saying more, without asking her to be his wife, she would hold him dishonourable and treacherous, she would despise and hate him as one who had won from her some show of preference only to laugh at her, to make light of her love and leave her.

If he could bear this pain himself, could he bear to make her suffer as he knew she would suffer? Not from slighted love. No, all the love she might have felt for him, all the love that he had hoped and trusted was growing up in her heart for him would be

crushed out of her, but from wounded pride. Ah! how would she bear it—she, who was so sensitive to the smallest slight?

Surely it was not possible for a man to endure more than once in a lifetime such agony as Guy Lawrence endured in that short time.

He remembered ever after just how the sun cast shadows on the opposite wall, just how his brother's voice sounded in the still summer air; even the scent of many roses wafted through the open window would in after years bring that scene back to him with sickening intensity.

He looked at his young brother, bright with youth and new hopes, and tried to speak naturally; but in his voice was an echo of dull pain, that with all his care he could not smother, that would have aroused the attention of any one less self-engrossed.

"I will try to think of all this, Bertie. You must give me time. I will go for a stroll, and come back to you." And he turned to go.

If he could only get away—away from everybody and be alone, he might bear it, might be able to think, to ask himself

whether it was in his power to make this sacrifice.

"Going away? Why, in the name of all that's wonderful, can't you think here, if there's anything to think about?" exclaimed Bertie, fretfully. "Confound it, Guy! I've been wasting my breath for the last half-hour, and I believe you haven't even been listening. What's the good of your telling a fellow you can help him, and then going out for a stroll? By George, I'll give the whole thing up, or I'll do it without your assistance."

Guy turned back.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Do? Why, I've told you a dozen times. The whole thing's as plain as a pike-staff. Here am I, Bertie Deverell, a beggar. Do you think it's any good my trying to obtain that old ruffian's consent to my marriage with his daughter? I had given up all idea, all hope of it, but you chose to offer me your assistance—remember it was your own doing, and if you wish to get out of it you can—but if you meant anything by such an offer and stick to it there is only one way of helping me. You must go to her governor and make things square about

my prospects and expectations, and all the humbug those sort of people expect you to talk when you propose to their daughters. Satisfy him somehow; you, the owner of Erlesmere, can easily do that—tell him that, thanks to your generosity, I may not be quite a beggar, and make him consent to the engagement till I'm of age."

"What have I to do with asking Captain Lorton's consent?" asked Guy.

"Simply this: unless you do, he'll not give it. I'm in love with Kitty—not with Kitty's father. *Entre nous*, he's a regular old cad, and I shan't be too proud of my father-in-law."

Bertie laughed—a confident, self-assured laugh, that nearly drove Guy mad—as he threw himself back and caressed the little golden moustache, that lay like a faint shadow on his upper lip.

"But you see Kitty isn't quite so much alive to her father's shortcomings as I am, and she might see things differently, and though I've little doubt she'd soon consent, yet it might go hard with her to make her marry without the old fellow's leave, so he must be humoured for her sake. You must go, Guy; he'll take all you say for gospel; my

words would have little weight. You are rich, I am poor—*voilà tout*.”

Guy did not speak. Bertie looked at him with elevated eyebrows, and his face slightly flushed.

“It is evident you don’t care about the office. Excuse me for taking you at your word. I was fool enough to suppose you meant it, when you said you would do what you could for me. I won’t trouble you.”

Guy came near him, and spoke in a low, constrained voice.

“Time enough to speak about troubling me when I think of it, Bertie. I have told you I want time to consider this ; it’s not a thing to be undertaken lightly. Independently of other things, is it so easy for me to pledge myself for you ? Are you so fit to be trusted with this girl’s happiness ?”

He turned and walked hurriedly up and down with folded arms.

“God knows I’m not fit to set myself up as any man’s judge, but you are so young—can you depend on yourself ? It is so hard—so hard,” he muttered, between his closed teeth, “to trust her to you.”

“Good Heavens, Guy ! it is too absurd to hear you talk as if you were her father.

Leave the matter alone, and leave us alone. We shall manage well enough without you, no doubt. We can wait till something turns up."

Vague words, which Guy scarcely heard, for all his heart was rebelling against that one word "we," which seemed to take it for granted that she was his already. He answered slowly and painfully—

"I'll do my best for you, Bertie, now and always; but I will have time. Leave me now, and come to me again in an hour or two."

And Bertie turned away, carelessly humming a tune, and closing the door left him alone. Alone with his bitter, miserable thoughts, and the fierce struggle going on in his heart. The wild, passionate love, the desire to gain her in spite of every obstacle battling against the memory of his vow, with the echo of the dead woman's voice ringing in his ears. He had vowed to give, should there be need, his very life for his brother; but not this—not this. This was more than his life—his love and his honour.

CHAPTER IV.

KITTY LORTON stood at her window disconsolate. It was more than a week since Lady Caroline's death ; and she was wondering as she leant against the window-frame, gazing right away into the distance to where a large, grey, castellated building glimmered faintly through the thickly overshadowing trees, when she should see Guy Lawrence again.

Bertie Deverell, her constant companion and quondam playfellow, came in for but a small share of her thoughts ; for she was thinking of that day under the trees—thinking of how Guy Lawrence looked and spoke, how she had in her heart almost acknowledged that she loved him, and of the strange abrupt ending to it all. And she had never seen him since. It was hard, very hard, that the only love episode in which she had ever taken any real interest

should have been interrupted in so sad a manner.

She had loved Lady Caroline and grieved over her loss ; but she was young, and even her grief, though it was very real, could not keep her from dwelling with a strange glad happiness that would not be quenched, on the remembrance of Guy Lawrence's half-spoken love.

She never doubted that he would come soon. She never doubted that he loved her ; though it was her way to mock at most things, to disbelieve and make light of professions of love, the truth and honesty of this man's nature asserted itself, and Kitty believed in him as much as she loved him.

Yes, she did love him—she could not help it. She had not quite acknowledged it to herself that day when she came home from her ride, and burying her flushed face in her hands thought of all he had said—so little after all. She had thought then that perhaps it was only gratified vanity, only that she was so proud to have won the love of a man so great and clever, and far above herself in every way—but now she knew better ; these long weary days of waiting had taught her how much she wanted him ;

how, with all the intensity of her nature, she craved to look once more into the grave, tender eyes, and feel the grasp of the strong hand. Kitty's face flushed impatiently at her own "foolishness." She stretched her pretty neck out of the window to cool her cheeks in the soft morning air, and get a better view of the little path that wound across the fields to Erlesmere.

Somehow she had not cared to ride this morning, and she was dressed with more than usual care, and she looked more than usually pretty. Her brown-holland dress was plain enough, almost coarse, but it fitted to perfection, tracing the beautiful supple lines of her young figure, and her chestnut hair was twisted in wonderful coils around her little head. Only a pretty English girl, without a single ornament to relieve the simplicity of her dress, but fairer to look upon than many a grand lady in silk attire.

Kitty Lorton was an only child, left very much to her own devices, free to find her own amusements and occupations, and with no kith or kin to care much what became of her. Her mother had died when she was a little child. Her father, a half-pay

Captain, late of H. M.'s ——th Foot, with a would-be-grand air, and dubious antecedents, was looked upon with suspicion and treated with marked coldness by all the county families round Erlesmere. His only occupations were betting and gambling, and he was to be found daily in the billiard-room of Sloughborough (the county town near Erlesmere) smoking cheap cigars, and ready to prey upon any game that came within reach. At the annual county race-meeting he was always to be seen, betting-book in hand, delivering his "tips" with a patronizing air to the gilded youth of the sporting fraternity, and he would even so far condescend as to relieve them of their superfluous cash when an opportunity offered.

He had come into a small property soon after his wife's death, which included an old rambling house just outside the Erlesmere grounds, and there he had brought his little child, and had lived ever since, with the exception of sundry excursions abroad, where it is to be supposed he dissipated all the remainder of his small inheritance, for there seemed to be little or no money left to spend on the half-ruined house, the neglected

garden, or the desolate, motherless child. Poor little Kitty's forlorn condition gained her one friend. Lady Caroline Deverell found her one day straying in the grounds of Erlesmere, and looking into the sweet baby face, forgot all the father's faults, and forthwith took the child under her protection, and was never-ceasing in her kindness until the day of her death. Kitty shared the instruction of her boy's governess, Kitty rode one of her ponies, Kitty played all day in her garden, was cared for as one of her own children; but Captain Lorton's obsequious thanks and overflowing gratitude for Lady Caroline's kindness to his motherless darling were received with the most distant coldness, the most freezing politeness. Nothing he could do would bring him one inch nearer to Lady Caroline and her set; but though in the first burst of his indignation at the discovery of this fact he vowed his child should not associate with people who were too grand to know him, yet eventually his prudence got the better of his anger, and he was too wise to stand in his own light. It was so great a convenience to him to have the child taken care of all day at the great house, that after the indulgence of a good

deal of strong language on the subject, he resolved to pocket his pride and leave her to go there as much as she pleased. And then, when Kitty grew up, Lady Caroline loved her and treated her as her own daughter, took her to the annual Sloughborough balls, lent her a horse instead of a pony, and disregarded the indignation of all the county dames, who, jealous for themselves or their daughters, could not bear that Kitty should be brought amongst them as one of them, and snubbed her and treated her with as much coldness as they dared show to Lady Caroline's protégée. But pretty, saucy Kitty cared nothing for their coldness, and laughed and flirted and won all hearts with her sweetness and fresh young beauty. Lady Caroline rejoiced more than any one in Kitty's triumphs, and looked forward with pleasure to the day when she would choose one of her numerous adorers, make a good marriage, and be free for ever from the contaminating influence of her disreputable father. It grieved her sorely when she was dying to feel that the girl was left unprotected, and Kitty shed the bitterest tears that had ever dimmed her bright eyes when she knew that her kindest, truest friend had

left her alone in the world. But even through the mist of tears there dawned a bright hope of one who should protect her and care for her through life unto death. She sorely needed protection, for there was no one left to take care of her but the vagabond father, who had little thought but for his own amusements and dissipations. Now and then he would wake up to take a selfish sort of pride in Kitty's beauty and refinement—he would build castles in the air of the grand match Kitty should make: he would exult in the idea of *his* daughter queening it over the best of them, and exciting the envy of the grand county people who had dared to look coldly on him; but usually he manifested an absolute indifference to what became of her. Sometimes he seemed even to resent her superiority to himself, and he appeared to take Lady Caroline's death as a personal injury. What right had she to raise his daughter above her proper station and then leave her to come back to him and his poverty?

It would not have been wonderful if Kitty had not cared much for this father, who had been so little of a father to her; but she did love him, with a strange sort of pitying ten-

derness, not at all like the love of a child for a parent. She was so compassionate to his faults, so quick to resent it if any one blamed him, so eager to hide all his weaknesses. She blamed herself for wishing to leave him all alone in his old age—such a miserable, pitiable old age it would be. And he was aging so rapidly—late hours and constant excesses were making him old before his time. And yet she could not but feel that the life she would have to spend with him would not be a fit one for a girl of her age—only nineteen. Was she to live for the future with no associates, no belongings but this old man and his dissipated companions? No, she could not live so. She had other hopes now—hopes which made her heart beat faster and her soft cheek flush deeper as she leant against the window watching the path that led from Erlesmere.

“Will he come?” Again and again she asked herself whether, after all, she had been deceiving herself—whether she had been making too much of what was only an idle flirtation—whether she had been foolish to think he meant anything by that brief love-making under the trees? That was the first and only time he had spoken to her in

that way. They had spent many days together during this long bright summer, when Lady Caroline was slowly dying, and Guy had come from Italy to be with her ; but Kitty had never really thought he cared for her until that day, and then she had believed she had read in his eyes that he loved her.

Would he go now without coming to bid her good-bye? She had heard from the servant that Mr. Lawrence and his brother were going to leave Erlesmere, and that the house would be closed for the present. Surely, surely he would never go without coming to see her once more? They had grown so intimate in their daily association during Lady Caroline's illness, been such friends, if nothing more.

Poor Kitty ! She was sick and weary of waiting ; her eyes were strained with watching ; she turned from the window and threw herself into a chair, looking round the poor, barely-furnished little room, in the hope of finding something to do ; but it was hard to do anything while all the time she was conscious that she was expecting some one who would not come. She twisted her little white fingers in and out, she tapped

her pretty foot impatiently on the floor, she wished she had gone out for a ride, she began to think she did not care a bit if she never saw Guy Lawrence again. It was only that she was tired and *ennuyée*, and life was very dull and stupid, now that she had nothing to amuse her.

But all at once she started up, and with a face rosy red rushed to the window again. The sound of a footstep on the gravel path had caught her ear, and, looking down, her eyes rested on a tall, broad-shouldered figure, and a face down-turned, half hidden by the stooping hat and thick, brown beard. Her heart beat quickly; he had come to see her—another minute and she would stand by him, her hand in his: and then she ran to the glass and began to smooth the *crepé*, fuzzy hair, to push back the little soft curls that clustered too low on her forehead, to arrange the linen collar that encircled her round, white throat—poor little Kitty!—all to make herself fair in his eyes; and then, with a flutter at her heart, she gently opened the door and waited for the summons that would come for her to go to him. But no message came, and Kitty, growing impatient, stole noiselessly down the stairs.

There was no one in the deserted drawing-room, but the sound of voices came to her from a little room at the back of the house that looked into the garden. Kitty crept past the door, on into the kitchen.

"Jane, who was it came just now?"

"Mr. Lawrence, Miss. He asked for master, and went into the study."

"Into the study?"

"Yes, Miss; and awful grave he looked, to be sure; they do say he took on about Lady Caroline's death a deal more than the other one—Mr. Bertie."

And then Kitty came away, and rushing back to her room threw herself on the sofa and buried her flushed cheeks in her hands to hide a glad exultant smile that would ripple all over her face. Not very well versed in the ways of the world was Kitty Lorton, but for all that she thought she could guess why Guy Lawrence wanted to speak to her father, and what sort of conversation was going on in that little room. How well she could imagine how they would both look and speak—Guy with his calm, grave face, his low-toned voice and quiet manner; Captain Lorton, with his braggadocia air and loud tones, put on to hide the

uneasiness he always felt in the presence of those whose superiority was a reproach to him. He was a gentleman by birth; he had once been a gentleman in manner and habits; he still retained enough of the instinct of his class to make him conscious of how low he had sunk, to make him painfully self-assertive and uncomfortable in the presence of those with whom he should have been able to associate as an equal.


Kitty coloured painfully as she thought to herself of all this. She knew that Guy would try hard to ignore it, but it could not but jar upon him. She loved her father, and she would scarcely acknowledge, even to herself, how much it pained her, as she sat there waiting, to know that Guy would not be able to feel any respect or honour for him. Never mind; he was good, he would make allowance for her poor father, he would be blind to his faults.

How long the time seemed—would it never end? Once or twice she crept down the stairs, but only the murmur of voices reached her ear. She went back to her room and paced up and down, with her hands pressed against her heart, as if to still its beating. She never doubted the issue of

the conversation, or that she herself was the cause of it. Guy Lawrence was no friend of her father's, had never before entered his doors, and he could have but one object in coming now. But still this suspense was hard to bear.

And then she turned to the glass and wondered how he could love her, wondered whether it was all for the sake of the pretty little face that looked back at her with bright excited eyes, and wished she was ten times prettier, to be worthy of him.

Poor little Kitty, with her childish face, her warm heart, her unwavering faith, all to be changed so soon and so terribly! The world seemed so bright and fair, so full of hope and love and unspeakable happiness to her now. In the overflowing gladness of her heart she threw herself on her knees by the open window, and, looking up into the blue sky, thanked God that he had been so good to her. It was only a childish, impulsive little thanksgiving, just as the birds in their outbursts of song on a bright summer's morning seem half unconsciously to be thanking the Giver of all good things for the light, and sunshine, and air which have made their hearts so glad.



For Kitty was only a little heathen, with a very dim consciousness of what was right and what was wrong; and in the after-time, when all hope, and trust, and love seemed crushed out of her heart and life, she thought of that prayer with a bitter disbelief in the Providence that had made her lot so hard. At last the door of the room downstairs opened, a quick step crossed the hall out to the gravel walk, and, looking down, she saw Guy Lawrence pass through the little garden with hurried strides, without once turning his face towards her.

She was bitterly disappointed, she had certainly expected to see him; but she had little time to think or wonder, for she heard her father calling her, and taking one last look at Guy's departing figure, she hastened downstairs.

Captain Lorton called her into the drawing room, and told her with a mysteriously important air he wished to speak to her; and Kitty stood before him with a little, blushing, eager face, which she tried hard to make appear unconscious.

Captain Lorton took a turn round the room, twirled his moustache, looked out of the window, and began in an uneasy,

hesitating sort of way, for all his pompous manner.

"H'm! my dear, I want to talk to you—very important matter. Lawrence—aw—has done me the honour to make a proposal for your hand."

Ah! she was right. What glad bright eyes took one swift glance at her father's face, and then hid themselves under the long, drooping lashes.

"He says his brother will be of age in a short time, a comparatively short time—two years, in fact. He assures me that his prospects are—ahem!—everything that can be desired; that should you wish it you can live at Erlesmere, and that he will make handsome settlements on you—on you, my dear. Most unusual, I'm sure, and I may say, most handsome."

Kitty was staring at him with dazed eyes and a face utterly confused, from which every vestige of colour had fled.

"His brother!" she gasped. "What do you mean? What has his brother to do with it?"

"Simply this," sneered Captain Lorton, dropping the grandly pompous manner he had thought necessary for the occasion;

“the young fool’s in love with you, and he’d find it precious hard to get you, I can tell him, penniless young beggar! only that Lawrence has chosen to come forward and promise him a thousand a year, from the day of his marriage; and more than that—and it’s a piece of devilish good luck, I can tell you, girl—he’ll settle five hundred a year on you—only fancy, f-i-v-e hundred. What the fellow can be such an infernal idiot for I can’t make out, or why he should trouble himself——” He stopped, aghast. Kitty, with a set, white face, with clenched hands and haggard eyes, came close to him and looked into his face.

“He—wants—me—to—marry—his—brother?” she gasped out slowly and painfully, each word separated with terrible distinctness by the white, quivering lips.

Captain Lorton drew himself angrily away.

“Confound the girl! What’s the good of this tragedy-queen sort of play-acting—pretending you don’t know all about it? Why, Lawrence as good as told me that you and that young curly-headed fool understood each other—had been spooning all this time, and only wanted my consent.”

"He said that?" asked the girl, still in the same hard, unnatural voice.

"Yes—he—said—that," mimicked the Captain, thoroughly provoked. "What the deuce do you mean by pretending you don't understand me? I'll have no more of these fine-lady airs. It's lucky your grand friends mean to do something for you after spoiling you as they have done. A pretty daughter you would make for a poor man. Don't let's have any more humbug about it, Kitty. It's no end of a good catch for you, and you haven't played your cards so badly. You'll be Mrs. Bertie Deverell in less than two years, with fifteen hundred a year, a magnificent house to live in when you please, and a good chance that you or your children will come into the Erlesmere property some day. Lawrence dropped several hints as to the improbability of his ever marrying. Devilish queer chap, that Lawrence—looked awfully fishy; white face, heavy eyes—shouldn't wonder if he lived hard; no knowing what your quiet fellows do on the sly."

And all the while Kitty stood there and listened, her face white and cold, her breath coming in quick, heavy gasps, her hands

clenched tightly together. She tried to speak when her father paused, but her words were scarcely audible.

"Papa, there is some mistake, I—I *know* there is some mistake."

Captain Lorton looked at his daughter with a strange scrutiny in his bloodshot, pale grey eyes.

"Have you been playing for higher game?" he asked with a sneer. "You've made a mistake if you have. I advise you to be satisfied with what you've got. Understand this: I'll have no nonsense about the matter. You'll marry this young fellow, or you'll provide for yourself some other way. I've made up my mind to sell this place and go abroad. I'll wait here till your marriage, but I'll be hanged if I stay in this dull hole and keep up this place all for you, who never came near me as long as the fine madam up yonder was alive."

All Kitty's hot temper was roused.

"Don't trouble yourself," she answered, with a curl of her lip. "I'm not likely to be a burden upon you, or any one." Then all the anger melted out of her heart, and only the bitter pain remained. "Father, father, have a little patience; wait a little

while. I will give you my answer soon, but I, I—oh, I *must* see Mr. Lawrence first. There is some mistake, I know. I know there is some mistake.”

Captain Lorton burst out into a torrent of angry words, but Kitty never heard them. She turned and fled. Snatching up her garden-hat from where she had flung it down in the porch a few short hours ago, when she had come in laughing and happy from her morning stroll, she rushed out into the bright glare, half blinded by burning tears, half mad with wounded pride, heedless where she went, so that she might only hide herself away from everybody: so that she might be quite alone;—alone to realize the utter misery that was in her heart. She went on and on, along the glaring white road, unconscious of the sun beating down on her head, and the great sharp stones wounding her feet in their pretty delicate slippers, with fierce anger and passionate rage swelling in her breast—conscious of nothing but that her love had been rejected with contempt, and that the bitterest insults had been heaped upon her.

She went on, till a turning led her out of the road past a little brook that rippled and

murmured over the stones ; on, into a dense wood where the trees formed an unbroken canopy over head, and the long grass and ferns grew in rank luxuriance under foot. There she stopped, right in the heart of the wood, and there, safe from every eye, quite alone at last, she threw herself on the ground and buried her face in the soft grass.

Her heart was hot with anger and shame. She could not cry ; no tears would come now. Her eyes were burning and heavy, her lips parched and dry. She tried to think of it all, but she had no distinct remembrance of anything that had passed, it was all so confused. It seemed to her such a long, long time ago since she had stood at the window waiting—waiting for what? for the man who was coming to insult her—coming not only to reject the love he had tried to win, but to propose that she—the girl he had trifled with and scorned—should marry his brother ! All love, all sorrow were swallowed up in bitter anger, in a feeling that was very near to hatred for this man, whom she had trusted above all others. She lay on the ground with her pretty head sunk in the rank grass and moaned to herself, rocking herself to and

fro. She rebelled with all the passion of her nature against the cruel wrong that had been done her. What had she done to deserve such a punishment as this? Had she, in the impulsiveness of a warm, loving heart, been too quick to show her preference—too easily won by a few soft words and flattering looks? It was not that she had loved him and was so utterly, utterly miserable without him. She would try to crush all love out of her heart; she would try to forget the bright dreams that had made her so glad; but it was that he had despised her, made light of her—perhaps was even now laughing at the silly girl who had been so easily taken in, so absolutely foolish as to believe that he would stoop to make her his wife.

The thought stung her to madness, and she started up with a passionate cry. She had lain there for a long time, till all her limbs were stiff and cramped; her coiled hair was loosened and falling over her face; there were dark lines round her eyes, and a set, hard look on her mouth—the mouth that had been so soft and rosy a few short hours ago. All the young face was changed and hardened. She sat up now; she could

not lie there any longer. She would, she must know all the truth.

Several days ago she had received a message from the housekeeper at Erlesmere, with whom she had always been a favourite, asking her to go over and collect the music and other things belonging to her that had been mixed with Lady Caroline's, that they might be sent over to the Grange before Erlesmere was shut up.

She would go now. Her resolution was taken. She coiled up her loosened hair, smoothed her dress, and with almost a smile on her lips, set forth with eager footsteps on the road to the great house, with one fixed determination in her mind, that she would see Guy, Lawrence. She would see him, and seeing him, read in his face whether it was true or false. More than that, he should know that she cared nothing for him—if by no other means, she would seem to take pleasure in Bertie's love—she would promise to marry that boy. How her lip curled, and what a little miserable laugh she laughed at the thought of it! What did it matter? She would see Guy. After that the Deluge—she would marry anybody—do anything—get away from the

misery and degradation of her present life, and go into the great world and be gay—always gay, and forget that she had ever dreamt of better things—forget that once, when she was a young girl, only nineteen, she had hoped for another life—had hoped to be the wife of a man older and wiser than herself, not the plaything of a foolish, pampered boy.

And so she went on, thinking so bitterly to herself, and crossed the grounds of Erlesmere till she got in front of the house. The sun was sinking lower now, and the shadows from the cedar-trees on the lawn were falling on the old grey walls. Kitty crossed the terrace, and went in at the open door into the great silent house. She felt so strange as she crossed the gloomy hall, and the sound of her footsteps on the oaken floor echoed through the long corridor, where the old familiar portraits stared down upon her with the same dead vacant eyes. She thought of herself as she had been and as she was, with a sort of pity for her own misery, with a vague wonder how it was she could be so calm, when a few steps would bring her to him—when in a few moments she should know all. Yes, she

looked calm enough. Her face was quite set and unmoved, but the beating of her heart nearly choked her as she neared the library door. If he were at home he would be there, sitting with papers scattered about him, or gravely reading in the recess of the mullioned window, as she had so often seen him. Her hand was on the lock; one moment she paused in blind, unutterable terror, and then she knocked softly, and without waiting for an answer, entered the room.

He was there, sitting at the table, but there were no papers in front of him; his head had been sunk on his folded arms, but he raised it when she entered, and then he knew all that was before him—knew that he would with his own lips have to put the seal to his own dishonour. Kitty hesitated one moment, then she went forward, and held out a little cold hand, and spoke in a voice that, in spite of all her efforts, would sound hard and unnatural.

“How do you do, Mr. Lawrence? I was obliged to come here for some of my things. I—I wasn’t sure you were here. I’m afraid I’m disturbing you.”

He took the little cold hand in his; but acting did not seem to come quite so easy

to him as it did to Kitty, or he had not had time to put the mask on. She had taken him by surprise. He scarcely answered—only murmured something about “being always glad to see her,” and she smiled to herself to think he was confused in her presence, knowing he had done her wrong.

“You wont be troubled to make little polite speeches much longer, Mr. Lawrence—you are going away, I hear?”

“Yes, I am going away,” answered Lawrence, trying to collect his thoughts, “and I may not see you again. May I tell you now how glad I am—about you and Bertie?”

The words seemed to paralyse her. Some vestige of hope had yet remained to her; now it died out for ever, and for a moment she was absolutely speechless with the anger which obliterated every other feeling, and threw down every barrier of pride and assumed indifference.

“It *is* true, then?” she asked, looking at him with fierce haggard eyes, and her white parched lips could scarcely frame the words.

Guy turned away; he could not meet her eyes fixed on him with such wild entreaty; he knew too well then that he had not de-

ceived himself, that this had been a sacrifice not only of his own love, but of hers.

"Is it true?" she gasped; "you tell me it is true that you have planned a marriage between me and your brother—you have dared to—to——" and then she broke down and hid her face in her hands with a low wailing sound.

It was more than he could bear. He came towards her.

"Kitty, Kitty, for mercy's sake——" and then he stopped. One moment more and he would have told her all the truth; but the memory of his vow came between them.

She caught his hand.


"Guy, you did not mean it—say you were only trying me—trying how much I could bear. See how low I have stooped—I—I——" and then she broke away from him, sobbing bitterly. And there fell on them a silence—a silence that told more than a thousand words. She looked up. She raised her tear-stained face and looked at him. He stood with his arms resting on the mantel-shelf, and his face hidden in his hands. Then, all over her face there spread a deep crimson flush, dyeing her cheeks and her brow—even her throat—a flush of bitter

shame and deepest humiliation. She turned away very slowly. She almost staggered before she reached the door, and then she spoke. Her voice was low and dull; but each word fell upon his ear with terrible distinctness.

"I—I have made a mistake—not in myself, but in you. I can never forgive myself; but you must try to forget that I ever thought you other than you are."

And then she opened the door and tore away, blind with passion. He made one step towards her, uttered one cry which she never heard, and then with a low moan sank into a chair and buried his face again in his hands.

Then it was he first told himself he had done wrong. Then he felt that no motive, however great, could justify him in this deed. But it was too late now; whatever he might do or say he could not recall those few minutes, or blot out the remembrance of them from Kitty Lorton's mind. She would never listen to him again, never believe in him again, any word of love from him could only be an insult to her now. In his desperate resolve to sacrifice himself in all things to his brother, he had not only



ruined his own life, but he had done her a wrong which no mistaken idea of self-martyrdom could excuse. He saw it now. In his determination to be in all things true to his vow, he had felt that he could not take this girl for his wife, and leave his brother to suffer as he thought a man must suffer through the loss of her. Ay, more than that, leave him maybe to grow despairing and reckless, and to go to ruin for want of a woman's influence over his life. He knew too that had he, Guy Lawrence, married Kitty Lorton, Bertie, who was so jealous by nature, would have been alienated from him for ever, and so he would have destroyed for all time any hope of fulfilling his fatal promise.

And so he, with his set purpose, his strong will, had sacrificed himself, and never flinched from the torture he had caused himself. Not vain by nature, he had thought that Kitty would soon get over it. Only now when he looked in her face, and heard the words wrung from her in her agony, he realized all he had done—too late!

It was little wonder that he groaned in agony of spirit as he sat there and thought of it all—sat there till the twilight sank

into the darkness of night, and the deepest gloom fell over him, bodily and mentally.

And Kitty had torn home at utmost speed, and with crimsoned cheeks, panting and dishevelled, stood before her father.

"Papa, I will give you my answer now. Tell Bertie Deverell I will marry him when he pleases." And there she paused, breathless.

"The deuce! What does all this mean?" stuttered Captain Lorton, looking up amazed from a dirty old, betting-book, almost dropping the glass of gin-and-water that he was raising to his lips, from his shaking fingers.

"It's very easy to understand. Didn't you want me to marry him? Didn't you say I was to marry him whether I liked it or not. Haven't I always been a dutiful daughter and done my best to please you? You ought to be happy—happy as I am."

And then she laughed; but the difference of that loud, bitter mirth from her old merry tones never struck her father's ear as he sat there half stupid with drink. He only joined it with his own, and covered her with maudlin caresses, till she broke away from him, and rushing up into her own little room, locked the door and was alone.

CHAPTER V.

ON the morning before the day fixed for their departure from Erlesmere, Guy and Bertie were seated together at the breakfast-table.

Guy sat with his grave face half hidden by the newspaper he held open in his hand. Bertie, always playing restlessly with anything that happened to be near him, was tracing an elaborate pattern on the cloth with a fork when he broke the silence.

"Guy, old fellow," he began in his gay, débonnaire way, "one might as well breakfast with the Sphynx as with you. What a quiet chap you are. You seem to take a deuced deal of interest in the last sweet thing in divorce cases, or the price of Consols—which is it?"

Guy put down the paper and smiled.

"What is it, Bertie?"

"Nothing much. I'm only in rather a

fix as usual, and as you're presiding genius in this place now, I suppose it's the proper thing to appeal to you. You see, I asked Kitty to come over here to-day; there are some things of hers here, and I thought she'd like to take a last look at the place, and all that, and she seemed to think she'd like to come."

Guy winced at the name, at the tone of proprietorship in which it was uttered; but he knew he had no right to resent it, that Kitty Lorton was indeed engaged to his brother.

"Did you think it necessary to ask my consent before you brought Miss Lorton here?" he said.

"Not exactly," laughed Bertie. "Kitty is too much at home here to need treating as a stranger; but you see that tipsy old guv'nor of hers took it into his head to cut up rough about it, assumed an air of intense propriety, and said he couldn't allow his daughter to visit at Erlesmere under the circumstances, there being no lady at the house, &c. &c., unless he accompanied her. Devilish good joke, wasn't it?"

"What did you say?"

"By Jove, I was in a fix. What could I

say but that of course we should be highly delighted if Captain Lorton would do us the honour to come with his daughter? And all the time I was thinking how black you'd look at the mere idea."

"I *am* vexed, Bertie; but it's not for my own sake. You remember mother would never ask Captain Lorton to enter these doors; and it seems almost like disrespect to her to break through her rules so soon after her death——"

"Hang it, Guy! what could I do? It's hard enough to have such a father-in-law *in futuro* as that; don't visit his shortcomings on my unlucky head. When once I have married his daughter I shall cut his acquaintance, and if he thinks he is going to hang on to our skirts he'll find he's mistaken. Kitty's a brick—an angel; but her father is a precious mouthful to swallow. By Jove! it would have been enough to prevent many fellows from marrying the girl."

"Stop, Bertie. He is her father, remember; and though it's hard enough to feel any respect for him, you ought to treat him with civility."

"Well, anyhow," said Bertie, moving to

the door, "he'll turn up here this afternoon, I suppose. You needn't see him unless you like, and I must make the best of him."

"Stay; as he is coming it will be better perhaps, more hospitable, to ask him to dinner. It can't do much harm, and we'll try to get on with him as well as we can, for your sake, and—for his daughter's."

"All right, old fellow, just as you please, only don't give him too much liquor. Shouldn't wonder if we had to carry him home," and Bertie went out with a laugh, leaving Guy to think how he should entertain this girl and her father. She, whom he had pictured as the mistress of his home, was coming there as his brother's future wife. That was enough to make him forget all small worries.

He had heard nothing of Kitty Lorton since he had parted so miserably from her a few days ago—heard nothing but this one thing, that she had promised to marry his brother. How it had come to pass, or how to reconcile it with the belief which had been forced upon him when she had spoken to him in the library, he knew not, and could not ask. Only the fact remained—the overwhelming fact that made everything else

seem trivial and unimportant. What Guy Lawrence suffered during this time, how hard he struggled with himself not to let his love over-master him, none ever knew; but the misery of those few days was never forgotten in all his after-life. Sometimes he almost felt as if his love and his jealousy must get the better of him. Sometimes he tried in vain to remind himself that she was his brother's promised wife, and never, never could be his; and he could not help feeling a fierce delight in the remembrance of her half-confessed love. He felt as if he could not bear the sight of his brother's careless, boyish happiness. Oh, Heaven! what misery for him, who would have given all he possessed if he might have taken the priceless jewel of her life into his own keeping, to see it rough-handled by one who scarce appreciated its value. The woman he would have won for himself he had himself given into the arms of another. The sacrifice was made, and was past all recalling, though, when he knew what it had cost her, as well as himself, he would have recalled it if he could. He was unhappily mortal, and though he was capable of sacrificing his own happiness, he was not capable of witnessing another's

enjoyment of that which he had lost without begrudging it to him. Such heroism, such unselfishness was beyond his attainment, and he felt that it would be torture to him to see them together ; but he trusted that the strength which had never failed him yet—the powerful will which had held his love down without word or token of it, even while she, the woman who had awakened it, stood before him and pleaded to him, would not fail him now, but would enable him to play his hard part to the end.

That afternoon, as he sat in the darkened library, there came to him sounds of ringing laughter and light footsteps, as Kitty and Bertie were wandering through the old house, and over the terraces and through the gardens.

Kitty's laugh seemed louder and gayer than usual, and the restless footsteps seemed never quiet. How that laughter jarred on him : how it seemed to dispel all his illusions. He felt as if it were all a miserable dream. This girl, who seemed overflowing with wild spirits, could not be the same who had stood before him, in that very room, a few days ago, in the abandonment of a sorrow she had not been able to hide? Had she

only been acting a part from some poor motive of her own? He could not bear to think of it. His life did indeed seem utterly dark, for he had not even her memory to cherish, if she were indeed so different from the Kitty he had loved.

They might at least have left him alone in his misery—they need not mock his desolation with the sound of their joy, he thought impatiently—for their ill-timed merriment almost maddened him.

He did not leave his room until it was close upon the dinner hour, but when he joined his guests in the drawing-room it would have been hard to trace any signs of emotion in the grave, strong face, that was only a little paler and quieter than usual, or in the courteous, gentle manner that was only a little more formal. Kitty had thrown herself on a couch. She had some roses in her hand, and some in her hair and in the bosom of her white dress. A broad black sash tied in the folds of soft muslin round her waist, and a black ribbon encircled her round, white throat. Her cheeks were as bright as the roses, and her eyes were shining. Guy thought, as he looked at her, he had never seen her more bewitchingly beautiful.

She seemed the perfection of youth and beauty—overflowing with health and happiness.

Bertie was leaning on the side of the couch, bending over her, looking into her eyes, and whispering into her ear soft nothings, which provoked the gay retorts and the laughter which sounded louder and less musically in Guy's ears than the little rippling laugh he had once loved so well. The third person in the room, Captain Lorton, seemed to find himself *de trop*, for he was hovering uneasily about, examining the pictures through an eye-glass, and making little remarks thereon with the air of a connoisseur, which fell on unheeding ears, till Guy took compassion upon him and did the honours of Erlesmere.

However hard he found it to endure the assumption of familiarity, yet withal the obsequious deference, which Captain Lorton tried to hide under the pompous fussy manner, which he put on as he did his dress-coat, for great occasions; however hard it was to keep his attention and his eyes from wandering to those other two, Guy did not allow one sign of irritation or of weariness to escape him.

Throughout the dinner too—that horrible dinner which seemed such an eternity to him—he devoted himself almost entirely to the entertainment of Captain Lorton, and tried hard not to let the constraint which he felt whenever he spoke to Kitty, show itself in his manner to her ; and however much the parade of devotion, the low-toned remarks, the smiles and glances that passed between those other two—who seemed to make the little tendernesses allowable to “engaged” people as conspicuous as possible—really disturbed his composure, they never appeared to ruffle the easy indifference habitual to him.

But when after dinner Captain Lorton sank into a chair and—after many unsuccessful struggles to keep awake—into the arms of Morpheus, and Kittie and Bertie stood together in the window laughing and talking, Guy, thinking himself unnoticed, stole out of the room.

He went out into the still summer night, and the quiet beauty of the sleeping world fell on his aching, weary heart with a sense of soothing restfulness. The hushed repose, the tranquil solemnity seemed to rebuke the human passion, the human misery under which he was fretting and chafing. He

wandered away into the twilight gloom that lay under the trees, where the pale, pure stars began to shine dimly through the leafy branches, and there, where it seemed as if no sorrow or passion, bitterness or suffering, could ever intrude, and tried to gain strength for the burden which seemed almost greater than he could bear.

When he came back he entered the room very quietly, unwilling to disturb its occupants, and thinking himself still unnoticed he sank into a chair where he could not hear what they said, but where he could see the outline of the two figures standing out against the grey evening sky. He might not see Kitty Lorton again for a long, long time, and he wanted to take his farewell look at her unobserved.

He was destined never to forget it.

She was leaning against the oaken frame of the window, and Bertie was standing with one foot on the terrace and one on the sill very close to her.

Kitty saw Guy come into the room, and the spirit of revenge and mad coquetry entered into her and took possession of her. Her instinct taught her that though he had not cared to marry her he had loved her

well enough to have been sorely pained by the gaiety of her manner, by the well-acted love she had shown for Bertie throughout the evening. She felt that she could pain him yet more.

Guy did not know that she had seen him come in. He would therefore assume that whatever he saw her do now she did naturally—not for the sake of wounding him. Well, she would give him cause to think once and for ever that she loved his brother—not *him*. She would make him forget that scene in the library.

Bertie had been talking love to very cold and inattentive ears, but now Kitty's manner suddenly warmed, and she bent forward and listened. She raised her eyes and met the passionate light in his.

"Kitty," he said, reproachfully, "you are so cold and listless—a little while ago you seemed so gay and happy; but now when I talk to you, you scarcely answer, and your thoughts seem miles away. Do you remember that in a few minutes I must say good-bye to you, and go away from you for such a long time? Oh, Kitty, do you love me—look at me once and tell me that you love me."

"Why do you doubt it, Bertie?" leaning forward and laying one little hand on his arm. "Should I—should I marry you if I didn't love you?"

"Heaven knows! Women are so inscrutable; there is no reason why you should. You have had a dozen lovers more worthy than I yet. Kitty, you are sometimes so cold, I cannot help doubting you. Give me some proof—show me once that you love me before I go," he pleaded earnestly.

For a moment there was a silence. The girl's head drooped and her eyes were hidden. Then she suddenly raised her face, flushed and quivering—threw her white arms round Bertie's neck, and drawing him close to her pressed her fresh red lips on his in a long, lingering kiss. Then as suddenly her arms fell listless to her side; her face that had been crimsoned with a burning flush turned white as death. She stood like a marble statue, while Bertie, intoxicated with joy, lavished on her a shower of caresses, a torrent of eager impassioned words. She only knew, she only felt that she had succeeded in what she had intended to do—she had paid one small portion of

the terrible debt she owed Guy Lawrence. Watching him without seeming to do so, she had known that not one movement, one look of hers had escaped the dark eyes that were fixed upon her. She had felt, rather than seen, that he had started and flinched, as a man would flinch at some sudden acute pain, when she had pressed her lips to Bertie's; she had seen him clench his hands with nervous force, and then after a minute she knew that he had risen from his chair in the far-off dark corner, and crept noiselessly out of the room.

Ah, if she might have followed him then, if she might have had the right to go to him, and weeping out all the storm of passionate anger that was in her heart, tell him how bitterly she already repented the poor little triumph she had won — how dearly it had been bought, how soon repented of.

But she could only stay where she was, and, crushing all the aching pain, the desire to give way and break out into bitter sobbing, play her miserable part to the end.

Guy Lawrence only appeared again in time to bid his guests good-night. He went out on the terrace with them, and they all

stood there for a few moments talking ; or rather Captain Lorton was talking, for he roused up from his heavy slumber in a wonderfully garrulous, not to say affectionate mood, and Guy was only patiently listening; while Bertie, waiting to escort them home, stood a little apart with Kitty, and noting tenderly the worn look on her pale face, attributed it to sorrow at parting from him.

How little he knew all that was in her heart at that moment.

And then the inevitable "good-bye" had to be spoken ; then her trembling hand just touched Guy's, and she turned away with her father and her lover, and he went hastily into the house.

They little knew, as she turned her cold white face to take one last look at the old grey building bathed in a silver sheen of moonlight, what a miserable eternal farewell she took of the bright hopes of happiness that had so short a time ago gladdened her young life.

They little knew as they bade her good-night and watched her gliding noiselessly up the stairs, what a storm of tearless sobs would convulse that delicate figure ; how far into the night, through the silent hours,

the lonely, motherless girl knelt by the open window and looked across the quiet fields to the house where she had been so happy, till the moon waned and eastwards' the dawn reddened the sky, and a gentle breeze sprang up and fanned the little hot, sad face and closed the weary, aching eyes.

That was how Kitty Lorton took her farewell of Guy Lawrence.

CHAPTER VI.

THE morning dawned bright and fair. The brothers were to leave Erlesmere together; they had decided to do so after Lady Caroline's death, intending to pay a long promised visit to a cousin's country-house, and to stay there until the Oxford term commenced. After that Guy had meant to return to Erlesmere and—to Kitty. But now all those bright visions had vanished and everything was altered. Now he only longed to get away from the scene of his troubles, and he resolved that he would merely accompany Bertie to his destination, remain with him a day or two—as long as politeness to his cousin required—and proceed on his travels alone. But it had occurred to Guy that as things had changed with him, so had they changed with Bertie also, since the original plan of leaving Erlesmere had been decided upon. So he proposed

to Bertie to throw over the visit and remain where he was, and knowing that he was not over-fond of his own company, Guy offered, much against his inclination, to stay with him; but he could not feel very sorry that his offer was not accepted, for it was the very suffering of Tantalus to remain there and be a witness to the joys a cruel fate had denied to him.

"It was better not to upset the plan that had been made," argued Bertie, who had a selfish horror of painful memories or melancholy associations; and after his first short grief for his mother's death was passed, tried to shirk even the memory of it. "I can't bear this place now; I wish with all my heart I could stay near Kitty. I'd give anything to be able to be with her—little darling—but I can't stand this house now; it's so infernally gloomy, reminds one of all sorts of horrors. I must get away. Charlie promised me some first-rate shooting, and I can run over and see Kitty, you know, before I go back to Oxford."

And Guy was glad of the decision, though he secretly wondered at it; and he resolved that he himself would go abroad as soon as he could get away. There was no longer

any attraction for him in England; he would return to his old haunts, his old pursuits, take up his head-quarters in Rome, and in the old life try to forget the brief madness of this summer that was passed. In the vacation he might be with Bertie, make some short tour with him, or stay with him at Erlesmere, if he wished. He resolved he would always hold himself in readiness, for though he could not bear to seem to set watch and ward over his brother, yet he was terribly anxious to keep up his influence over him in every possible way. Guy Lawrence was thinking of all these things as he stood on that last morning in the breakfast-room at Erlesmere, waiting for Bertie, and the sunlight fell on a worn, anxious face, and eyes undermarked with dark, heavy lines, born of sleeplessness and sorrow.

There was something of autumnal freshness in the morning; the grass was bathed in gossamer, and the distant landscape was breaking through a purple, misty veil. Such a fair scene lay before him; but he turned away from the open window with a smothered sigh, and examined the two unopened letters he held in his hand.

The writing on one of them seemed half familiar to him; he looked at it critically and then broke the seal. It was a long letter—the writing was very large, bold, full of character, but it was almost illegible in some places, and adorned with many blots and emphatic dashes. As Guy read the first page, a smile flickered on his face, as if the style or language of this letter—evidently a woman's—caused him some amusement, but as he read on the smile very quickly faded, and the worried anxious look deepened.

It began thus:—

“MY DEAR GUARDIAN,—How shall I begin? How shall I write of all I yearn to tell you—of all I must tell you, without causing you pain, without appearing ungrateful? You, my preserver and saviour, found me in the streets, a waif, having no friends, no home, living a degraded, vagabond life. You rescued me from ill-treatment, from want and shame, from no other motive than the kindly impulse that sprung from your generous heart. Madre di Dio bless you for it. But when I look out into your streets and see a half-starved bird flut-

tering his dusky feathers in the wind, only eager to pick up such chance crumbs as fortune throws him, like the little vagabond he is, I think of him caged, sheltered from wind, and cold, and want, but striking his wings in wild despair against his bars, or drooping in his dainty prison, longing for the liberty he has lost.

“You have sheltered, clothed, and fed me ; you have saved me from the misery of a degraded life ; yet these walls seem to me a prison. I feel shackled by the discipline of my daily life ; vagabond instincts still possess me. I long to be unfettered. My home should be the open world. I would be a beggar in the public streets again, if only I might be free. Oh ! how miserably ungrateful you, my benefactor, will think me. I despise myself for my wretched discontent ; and you will regret the kindness you have shown me when you find that *this* is my only return for it ; but I feel that I must speak to you—that I must beseech you to save me from a life that would kill me. You have chosen for me a future that would be to me a hopeless servitude—the career of a governess. Think, I entreat you, what my life would be. I,

who chafe under the constraint of your formal conventionalism, would need to check all freedom of action, all independence of opinion, all thought of self, to be subject to the caprice of others—others who would despise me for my low origin, and hate me for my superiority to themselves. You have not seen me for years. You think of me—ah, do you ever think of me?—as the wild, uncultivated, miserable child you found me ; but I am now a woman, resolute in will, beautiful in face and form. You will call me vain ; but is it vanity to be conscious of these gifts, to glory in them, because I know the power they will give me? If it is, then I am vain. And now I tremble with agitation, for I approach the one ambition of my life. My heart beats with enthusiasm, but it throbs also with anxiety ; for in your hands, in your decision, rests my destiny.

“ I want to be an actress. I want to win for myself a position to which I have now no claim. I would conquer with my talent and my beauty, so that I should not need to blush for my low origin ; so that men should admire and women should envy me. *I can* do it. I feel, I know I *can* do it, if

you will help me. Will you leave me here? The restraint is killing me: the people you have left me with dislike me; they dislike my ways, that I have not been able to mould to your English standard; my intolerant spirit, that will not be fettered or dragged down to the dull level of their English proprieties; not a spark of sympathy unites us; we seem like beings of two different worlds. How wearily the years have passed since I came here, and yet the memory of you is fresh as ever. I have never seen you—not once. Not once since that day when I clung to you and cried in my childish despair at being parted from you. Oh, how I have longed and longed in vain to see you. Let me see you now, that I may plead my own cause with you. Be my friend as you have ever been, my only friend, and grant my prayer. Forgive me if I seem ungrateful, and believe that I never for one moment forget all your goodness to me, or cease to bless you for it.

“CELIA RAGONI.”

When he had finished reading this strange letter, Guy Lawrence stood looking at it, as if he were lost in amazement. “The girl

must be mad," he thought, "mad with conceit and vanity, to write such a farrago of high-flown nonsense;" and then he hastily opened the other one. It ran thus:

"Laburnum Villa, St. John's Wood.

"SIR,—I feel it is my duty to write to you respecting the young girl, Celia Ragoni, whom you placed in our charge eight years ago, and who was then supposed to be about twelve years of age.

"In consideration of the very handsome sum you paid us for her board and education, and being also extremely anxious to oblige the son of our dear benefactress, Lady Caroline Deverell (now departed from this mortal sphere), we undertook the charge of this young person. You must pardon me if I admit that we have never ceased to regret having done so, and that nothing but the fact of our being in very necessitous circumstances would have induced us to continue the charge.

"I write now to beg that you will inform us what are your wishes with respect to Celia Ragoni. I regret to say that she is extremely wilful, very vain and forward, and pays no attention to any of her studies

except singing and Italian. For these we have provided her with the best masters, according to your instruction, and these she cultivates with persevering assiduity. Understanding that it was your intention to educate her for a governess, we have tried to carry out your wishes ; but in vain : she is absolutely ignorant of many things a lady ought to know. She shows sad proofs of her miserable birth and early education in wickedness. These faults I fear will never be eradicated, she manifests such want of the modesty and reticence befitting a young woman—but, alas ! what else can be expected from the child of an actress ? She is extremely passionate and violent, and my sister and I regret to inform you that we can no longer undertake the responsibility of watching her. We feel certain that she will lead us into some trouble, and that we are not capable of controlling her, neither is she a fit inmate of our humble and modest home.

“ Begging, therefore, that you will communicate to me your wishes with respect to this young person,

“ Believe me to remain

“ Your obedient servant,

“ TABITHA MORGAN.”

Guy closed the letter, and his thoughts wandered to a time and a life long past, almost forgotten in other hopes, other cares.

In the Quixotism of his nature, when he was young and full of warm sympathies, easily excited by the misery and suffering of others, he had taken upon himself a charge which then seemed light enough, but which now was likely to cause him much anxiety and trouble. Eight years ago, when all his energies had been centred on one object—the study of painting—he had lived for some years at Rome, and had become a pupil of the most celebrated of the many artists who congregate there. Daily, as he went to and from the studio, his attention was attracted by a little girl, who in a tawdry spangled dress, with a tambourine in her little sun-browned hands, sang and danced in the public streets. First, he only noticed the child's picturesque attitudes, her tangled locks, large bright eyes, and her sweet childish voice, but soon he began to feel an intense pity for the miserable unchildlike life the poor little thing was compelled to live. Each day he watched her grow thinner and more starved-looking, her spangled dress hung

loosely and more loosely on her attenuated little figure, her big eyes grew bigger, and her voice, that had been so sweet and clear, grew weaker and weaker, and sometimes failed utterly.

When she broke down in her song or her dance she would steal a piteous look at the man who had the charge of her. At last there came a day when the child's voice was scarcely audible, and the listless limbs refused their office, even though the poor little dancer evidently tried her utmost under the influence of fear. Guy, watching from a distance, saw the old man go close to her and mutter something in her ear; then dragging the shrinking child by the arm, he gathered up the glittering tambourine and the little piece of carpet on which she used to dance, and turned into one of the narrow byways that led out of the crowded thoroughfare.

Lawrence followed them at a distance through many streets and dirty unfrequented lanes—the old man in his tattered costume still dragging the shrinking child after him—till at last in a street more lonely and squalid than the rest, he halted, breathless with haste and anger, and turning on the child, his hand descended on her

head and shoulders in a shower of heavy blows, accompanied by fierce oaths and curses spoken in a curious jargon—a mixture of French and Italian.

A moment later Guy had seized his collar and hurled him across the street, and the child was clinging with piteous sobs to her protector. For a minute the man lay on the ground stunned by the fall; the next he sprang at his assailant's throat with thin, tigerish fingers, but Guy only shook him off as he would have shaken off a noisome insect. There followed a volley of foul language, but Guy arrested it. With his quiet, authoritative air, his not-to-be-shaken determination to give the old man up to the authorities for ill-treatment of the child, he gradually drew from him a confession of the truth.

He was a Frenchman, and the little singer was the child of a poor Italian dancer, who, after a life of sin, had died in the utmost wretchedness in a garret in a back street in Paris. The child, left absolutely destitute, had fallen into the hands of this man, who owned the wretched house where the mother died. He had kept her in the hope of gaining money by the precocious talent she manifested both in singing

and dancing. Things had grown worse and worse with the old Frenchman; he had been compelled to leave Paris, and he had taken the child from city to city, earning a wretched subsistence from the few pence that were thrown to her in the streets.

“But now her voice had failed—they were starving, he had no means of returning to Paris—he should never see his own country, he should die here like a dog—the child was obstinate, and would not sing or dance. Monsieur would surely understand—there were excuses to be made even for him. Without the child he might work his way back to his beloved Paris; but he was kind, he had a heart, he could not desert the little one. Did Monsieur doubt his kindness? Ah! he had seen him beat her in a moment of irritation, but he had not seen all; he could not know how he had been like a father to *la petite* ever since her mother died. Children must be corrected—he had taken her from charity, she was a burden upon him—through her he should starve in this wretched Italy.” All this and a great deal more he poured out in a torrent of rapid words, with a thousand deprecatory shrugs of the shoulders.

And while he had been speaking, Guy, listening to the miserable, shuffling excuses, and looking down at the little one clinging to him for protection, had already resolved on what he would do. He gave the Frenchman his address, agreeing with him that he should come to his room that evening, and he turned to go, feeling sure that he would keep the appointment; but the child, bursting into a storm of cries and shrieks, threw herself on the ground and clung to his knees with her little thin arms, in the desperation of a terrible fear. And so, a few minutes later, Guy found himself walking through the streets of Rome, with the little dancer in her spangled dress, holding his hand with child-like trustfulness, and from that hour he became the guardian and protector of Celia Ragoni.

He gave the child into the care of his landlady to be fed and dressed, and when the old man came in the evening Lawrence found little difficulty in inducing him to relinquish all claim upon her thenceforth and for ever. He would have been glad to part with her on any terms, but even his cupidity, excited by an idea of the Englishman's fabulous wealth, was more than satis-

fied by the large sum of money sufficient to take him to Paris several times over, which Lawrence handed to him, on the sole condition that having signed the paper in which he denied all relationship to or claim upon the child called Celia Ragoni, he should go away and they should see his face no more.

And when he found that his little scene of tender sorrow at parting from his "beloved Celia" was absolutely thrown away upon the cold Englishman, he dried up his tears, gathered up the money, and went on his way rejoicing.

A few days after Lawrence set out for England, taking the child with him; and having induced Lady Caroline to use her influence with an old lady (a *ci-devant* governess, who with her sister then kept a small school in St. John's Wood) to undertake the charge of the child, he took the little Celia and left her in their care.

From that time to the present he had scarcely remembered the serious responsibility he had undertaken—scarcely, indeed, remembered the child's existence, except when he sent the cheque to Mrs. Morgan, receiving in return formal accounts of his

protégée's health and progress. Two or three years ago he had received notice that the old lady and her sister had given up taking pupils, but he had written back to ask them to keep the child until she should be competent to earn her own living, asking them also to give her the benefit of the instruction of all the best masters, believing that the greatest kindness he could do her was to give her so good an education that she would be independent of charity when she was old enough to feel charity irksome. He only thought of her as a child. He remembered, as he stood pondering over the two letters, how the little bright-eyed thing had clung to him at parting, almost worshipping him in her passionate gratitude; how she had refused to leave him, and turned in a fury on the old ladies at St. John's Wood, petrifying them with a storm of abuse, poured out in a jargon utterly incomprehensible to their astonished ears. She was a poor, little, half-starved child then—only ten years old according to the Frenchman, who had wished to attract attention by her precocious talent, but by her own account twelve—and that was eight years ago.

And so Guy Lawrence, holding her letter in his hand, woke up to the fact that his charge was no longer a child; and that he, still a young man, found himself the guardian and sole protector of a girl, a woman twenty years of age, one who appeared to be of a wild, ungoverned disposition and a fiery Italian nature.

He had received several letters from her before, all full of gratitude and affection for her guardian, but none that in the least resembled this. This startled him, and he sighed wearily when he thought how helpless he was in this matter, and that if his mother had been alive she would have helped him and managed for him; but now he was alone, with no woman friend whom he could call to his aid. He was thinking of all this sadly enough, when the door opened and Bertie entered the room with a face bright and gay as the summer morning.

How different their two lives seemed; Bertie's all in the sunshine, his all in the shade. For a moment he shrank from looking at his brother. The last time he had looked upon him, the girl they both loved had been pressed in his arms, her

lips on his face; but it was only for a moment: the next his honest grey eyes rested lovingly on the boy, and his greeting was as warm as ever. So often is it the case with generous natures that they love best those for whom they sacrifice most; and Guy was trying hard not to grudge to his brother the happiness he had given up to him at such terrible cost.

Two hours after, the brothers left Erlesmere. And Kitty, watching from her window, where she could catch a glimpse of the high-road, saw the carriage roll away in the distance, bearing from her the two who had most influenced her young life—the man whom she loved, and the man whom she had promised to marry—and with a bitter cry she buried her face in her hands and sobbed out that she was utterly alone, without a friend in all the cruel pitiless world.

CHAPTER VII.

BURIED amid the intricacies of St. John's Wood, the haunt of mad doctors, fair members of the *demi-monde*, and that much-to-be-pitied and populous class who have seen better days, was a dilapidated house which would probably have been described in auctioneering parlance as a "charming villa residence, delightfully situate in its own grounds."

The house was a tumble-down building, which might once have been white, overgrown with some straggling creepers which might once have been green. The grounds consisted of two mouldy patches of brown earth divided by a weedy gravel-path, and a few miserable trees with dusty leaves hanging dry and withered upon their blackened branches. Over all there was an air of poverty-stricken respectability which had almost resigned the struggle to keep up

appearances or vie with the ill-gotten prosperity of some of the neighbouring houses, whose green Venetians and gay flower-filled conservatories, flaunted and glittered, like their occupants, in the summer sunshine.

It was altogether a cheerless house, this Laburnum Villa—the abode of Mrs. Morgan and Miss Pratt—these four brick walls that shut out their wilful passionate charge, Celia Ragoni, from the world in which she was longing with feverish eagerness to take her part, and that had become to her hateful as the walls of a prison.

It was a bright summer's morning. The August sun, which seemed to give gladness and beauty to most things on which it shone, only threw into stronger relief the faded carpet and sad-looking furniture, and showed up all the lines in the care-worn faces of the two sisters, as they sat together in their little sitting-room.

Arrayed in their best go-to-meeting dresses—black satins that had evidently been so “dipped” and dyed and subjected to all the feminine devices for making a new dress out of an old one, that there was little of the original texture left—and sitting bolt

upright in their most uneasy chairs, they were the very pictures of sanctimonious precision—these two elderly ladies.

There was a monotonous precision about the click of Mrs. Morgan's knitting needles, a well-regulated sameness in the pattern of Miss Pratt's crochet, which to judge from its complexion was about the same age as the lady herself, that was enough to drive one mad.

A melancholy-looking canary hanging at the window in a pagoda-like cage, under the influence of the sunshine so far forgot himself as to outrage the decorous propriety of his surroundings by an occasional chirp—a very doleful, almost sepulchral chirp, it is true, but quite sufficient to give him a reckless, dissipated air, not at all creditable in such a genteel, well-brought-up bird as he.

A dozen times had Mrs. Morgan arranged the strings of her best cap and shaken out the folds of her black satin, so as to show it to the greatest advantage. A dozen times had Miss Pratt fidgeted to the window and gazed down the gravel path; out into the dusty road, to the great annoyance of the melancholy canary, who could not under-

stand this unseemly excitement, and who appeared scarcely to appreciate the close proximity of a little withered face with sandy brows and light eyelashes.

"Do sit still, Amelia," said Mrs. Morgan, with an air of impatience, giving a jerk to her knitting needles. "Looking never brought any one yet. Young men of the present day display an incomprehensible indifference to the conventionalities of polite society, I must say. In my time gentlemen showed more punctuality when they made appointments with ladies. But there is a much-to-be-regretted looseness in their manners now."

"Yes, Tabitha," replied Miss Amelia, in a tone of pious sternness, as she returned to her chair and her crochet, "and in their morals."

"And in their dress. That poor, dear angel in heaven would no more have worn their collars and neckerchiefs! No; well starched stand-ups that kept his noble head erect, and cravats twice round called 'chinnners;' and then his pants!"

"Tabitha!" Miss Amelia stopped her crochet needle, drew herself upright, and, with an annihilating look at her sister, con-

tinued in stately tones, "Pray remember that I am present."

"I cannot see that any remark of mine can lead you to the supposition that I was unacquainted with the fact. At your age——"

Miss Pratt flared up: "My age? Well, indeed!—my age?" then changing her tone to ironical humility, "But I suppose conjugal ties must necessarily have a demoralizing effect. I ought to try to bear it."

"Yes; more especially as you are not likely to be subjected to such demoralization, my dear Amelia," retorted her sister with freezing severity. "I do wish Mr. Lawrence would come."

"I suppose it is foreign etiquette to keep ladies waiting," answered Miss Amelia, now somewhat calmed. "He has learnt it in Turkey, I shouldn't wonder, for there women are looked upon as so much dirt."

"Yes; I don't approve of young men going abroad so much. They learn sad ways—smoking, drinking, card-playing, and all kinds of improper things. The idea of his bringing home a stray child! Ah! when I think of that poor dear sainted creature, Lady Caroline, and what a pupil

she was, it makes my flesh crawl to think that I should have become the instructress of this girl."

"I wonder what he will decide to do with Celia?"

"Keep her longer *I* will not. Untold gold should not tempt me. As sure as I'm alive that girl will come to some dreadful end." Mrs. Morgan paused a moment, and then resting her knitting on her lap, and looking solemnly at Miss Pratt, continued: "Amelia, what should we do if we some day discovered that we had been nurturing a viper in our bosoms?"

"Tabitha!" and Miss Pratt modestly cast down her eyes.

"I mean," continued Mrs. Morgan explanatorily, "that we have been harbouring in this house——"

"Hush, Tabitha, don't say it before me, pray."

"No, Amelia, not that, exactly," continued Mrs. Morgan solemnly, "but much the same thing—an actress;" and she sank back overcome by the contemplation of such a calamity.


"Why do you even imagine such fearful possibilities, Tabitha? It is incredible that

this girl whom we have endeavoured to educate as a gentlewoman should sink to such a depth of degradation."

Mrs. Morgan leant back in her chair with a resigned groan, and sniffed vigorously at a huge bottle of smelling salts.

"Now, do calm yourself," continued Miss Amelia; "see, your cap is all crooked with the agitation of your feelings."

"It is easy to talk of being calm, Amelia," moaned her sister, "but all I have been through since that girl imbibed these play-acting proclivities is more than tongue can tell. Not content with screaming and practising Italian *bravuras* morning, noon, and night, she must needs stay up burning the candles, rampaging up and down her dormitory at an hour when any well-regulated, proper-minded Christian ought to have retired to rest. Not a wink of sleep could I get the other night, so I got out of bed and I went upstairs; and if you'll believe me, Amelia, there was that girl standing before the glass in a long white dressing-gown, all her hair streaming over her shoulders in the wildest tangle, raving as if she was demented; and when I said, 'Celia, go to bed this instant,' she



turned round and said, 'Out, damned spot! out, I say!' Shocking, you know, Amelia. And then she went on, 'To bed, to bed—there's knocking at the gate!' or some rubbish, and put out the light. Oh, it's dreadful; dreadful!" groaned the old lady, rocking herself in her chair, "to think that I should live to see such things go on in my house," and she again applied herself vigorously to her smelling salts.

"Now, Tabitha," interposed Miss Pratt, "pray don't excite yourself; only consider your poor head—and you're rumpling your dress. Dear, dear, you won't be fit to be seen when Mr. Lawrence comes—and one of your side-combs coming out, and your curls all awry. And there he is at the garden gate this very minute, looking as cool as possible, and not hurrying himself the very least." And she peered through the blinds at the tall well-dressed figure that crossed the path with slow leisurely footsteps.

Guy Lawrence stood at the sun-blistered door, flung away the end of a half-smoked cigar, and knocked with the manner of one pre-occupied (not to say bored), that boded ill for the interest he was likely to

take in the sins and shortcomings of his protégée.

After a few smirks and bashful eye-droppings on the part of Miss Amelia, she curtseyed in a stately manner to Guy, and left her sister alone with him.


With languid politeness Guy listened to all Mrs. Morgan's moaning and lamentation and depreciation of her foreign pupil; only when she had exhausted the topic he quietly promised that she should no longer be troubled with the charge of Miss Ragoni. He expressed his regret that she should so long have been subject to annoyance on her account, and his desire to see the young lady and ascertain her wishes as to her future.

Mrs. Morgan rose to go; but she hesitated as she reached the door.

"I trust you will make allowance for my anxiety, Mr. Lawrence. Anything it was in my power I would have done for the son of my favourite pupil, Lady Caroline, but the charge of this young lady is too much for me, at my age."

Lawrence bowed.

"I quite understand all that, Mrs. Morgan."



Still she hesitated, with a hand on the door.

"Is it your wish to see Miss Ragoni—alone?"

"Perhaps it would be as well," answered Lawrence with a half smile; "she may be afraid to say what she really wishes in your presence."

"Sir," answered the old lady sternly, "you will soon learn that Celia Ragoni has none of the proper reticence or fear of her elders that characterizes most young women in her station. She never hesitates to say all she thinks, whether it is right or wrong. I wish you good morning, Mr. Lawrence. I hope you will find her more amenable to control than I have done." And with a formal curtsey Mrs. Morgan left the room, and Guy was left alone to contemplate the glories of some faded paper flowers that adorned the mantelpiece, or to while away the time by admiring the crooked reflection of his own face in the little dusky mirror above, or the melancholy portraits of some bygone members of the aristocracy as they appeared in the "Book of Beauty," with infinitesimally small waists, attenuated hands supporting pensive faces with im-

possible eyes and birch-broom eyelashes, all looking as if they were rapidly sinking into early graves and going to a better world.

Guy began to wish himself anywhere but in this dingy room in Laburnum Villa.

It certainly was not a desirable place in which to pass a summer's morning, and the object of his visit was not a pleasant one either. The thought of this girl and her future hung like a weight on his mind. He felt no interest in her. The momentary impulse of pity which had led him to save her from her miserable life had long since died away.

There remained to him only the remembrance of a small child with large brown eyes with a pitiful look in them; whom now he pictured to himself as a gawky girl, with the same half-starved look and professional whine, which she had acquired in the streets eight years ago.

It is not well to repent of a good deed, but Lawrence felt half inclined to repent of the rash charity which had led him to interfere in other people's concerns—for after all it was not his concern to rescue this little waif, this stray atom of humanity. The Quixotic impulses of a generous nature

had led him to many an unwise act he had lived to repent of, many an unpremeditated deed that had been done in kindness of heart.

Guy Lawrence had the power to make great sacrifices, but he was not capable of the continuity of endurance, the patience under small worries, which perhaps constitutes the truest self-sacrifice.

He had given up that which he held dearest in the world because it had seemed to him impossible to secure his own happiness at the cost of his brother's ; but none the less he felt unable to bear the continual sight and reminder of what he had lost ; none the less he felt an intense regret at the necessity of such renunciation.

He had rescued a child from misery, because he could not find it in his heart to look and pass by on the other side, without doing what he could to save her ; but all the same he regretted and would have shirked if he could the responsibility and trouble that his generosity had entailed upon him.

Human inconsistency marred the heroism of a grand nature.

So Guy waited impatiently for the unfortunate recipient of his charity, and in

his heart anathematized the folly which had ended in bringing him to this hot little room, and keeping him there a prisoner to be worried by an old lady and a tiresome girl.

He pulled his moustache and grinned sardonically as he thought of himself in the character of a guardian angel.

"Look the part, don't I?" he muttered, as he glanced at his own dark face in the crazy mirror.

All the grave sweetness that had come into it with hope and love, had faded out now, and the eyes looked back at him with a dull angry light in them.

Wounded through his love and his faithfulness, too true to those whom he held dear to spare himself at their expense, yet Guy Lawrence cursed the fate which had made life so hard to him.

As he paced impatiently up and down the room, the handle of the door turned, there was a slight hesitation, and then Celia Ragoni came in, and he looked up and saw her; saw the woman whom he had left as a little unkempt child, in the glory of beautiful womanhood.

For she was beautiful, this Celia Ragoni—

this nameless, heritageless waif, this child of the people—beautiful with a regal beauty a queen might have coveted. The patrician carriage of her grand head, her proud bearing, her slow stately step, the swirl of her long skirt, as she swept towards him, struck the man who gazed upon her with a momentary astonishment that was not born of her beauty. “Was she an empress incognita, this creature whom his careless charity had rescued from ignominy or death?” But at the next glance, Guy, *soi-disant* artist, took in the whole splendid physique, the flesh and blood magnificence of Celia Ragoni. She was of the earth, earthy—that he saw. There was no semi-divine light in those slumbrous eyes, over which drooped the heavy white lids (eyes that made him think of volcanic fires), no Madonna-like purity about the make of those warm, full-blooded lips. There was no unfleshly over-refinement, no lack of development about face or figure; but there was rare perfection of form and tropical brilliance of colouring about this woman.

Guy thought, as he looked at her, of some splendid plumaged bird; thought of the mirage in the desert; thought of all sorts

of gorgeous tints, rich flowers, heavily-scented exotics, burning skies. Thought, do I write?—nay, rather felt; for this was Celia Ragoni's prerogative—to inspire sensation. To look upon her beauty was a species of moral dram-drinking. She stood, in comparison with your ethereal woman, as brandy stands to weak wine and water.

"Pity Rubens had not such a wife," half muttered Guy; "then he would not have sent down for all time a burlesque upon this splendid red and white—this fleshly magnificence."

She came towards him and held out her hand with an air which would have well become Cleopatra receiving Antony.

"At last you have come," she said; and Guy, listening to the quivering of the rich-toned voice, and looking into the eyes which flashed up to him, began to think less hardly of the fate which had brought him there.

"You are changed indeed. Is it possible that you are——"

"The little girl who sang and danced in the streets of Rome—the little girl who well-nigh broke her heart at parting from you? Yes, I am the same—and I have still the

same passionate worship for you, my preserver; you, the only one in all the world who ever cared what became of Celia Ragoni."

The voice, with its strange foreign intonation, thrilled with a world of feeling. The words that would have seemed to Guy so high-flown and inappropriate from ordinary lips, came naturally from her, with her rich southern beauty and majestic bearing.

"Ah! could you have known all the desolation and weariness of these years that you have forgotten me; with body, soul, and mind chained down to the horrible level of these dull English lives. Sometimes I have thought I could not bear it; that come what would I must go away and seek my fate in a world where, sooner or later, I must find some appreciation." She threw out her hands, and her face kindled as she spoke; then her eyes drooped and rested on his. "But I could not go without seeing you, I could not go and let you think me so ungrateful for all your goodness."

"I have never forgotten you," said Guy, thinking he spoke the truth; for indeed

how was it possible to look at Celia Ragoni and speak of forgetfulness?

She looked up into his face. "And now you have come to tell me my fate?"

Guy started; he had forgotten. It seemed so strange that he should in any way hold the fate of this beautiful woman in his hands.

He smiled to think how utterly unlike she was to anything he had imagined her to be. Could she be a governess?—this goddess among women! As she stood before him, the sunlight throwing up rich tints in her dusky hair, the soft folds of her plain grey dress falling around her splendidly moulded figure, like the robes of a queen, Guy tried to picture her in a dingy schoolroom teaching some ill-mannered children, or subjected to the petty tyranny of a spiteful mistress; and then his smile turned to a groan as he realized how impossible it would be to choose a life for one gifted with such rare physical beauty which would not be surrounded with a thousand dangers. He felt that this gift of beauty would be to her as a curse, dragging her downwards.

"Your fate is in your own hands, not mine," he said after a time. "How can I

wish to control you? You are capable, I should say, of judging for yourself."

"Then you will not refuse my wish. You will let me be an actress?"

"An actress! Heaven forbid! You, with your face, would make yourself a show for fools to gape at? You must be mad to choose such a life."

"What's the use of being beautiful if it can bring me none of the things I desire? I might as well be old, and ugly, and senseless, if I am to be shut up for ever within these four walls. Tell me, how can I gain power and fame, the appreciation that is my due, but on the stage? Will your proud English receive me amongst them, me, the daughter of a despised ballet-dancer, as an equal? Would you have me become the paid servant of one of them, to be reminded a thousand times a day of my low origin? Bah! I hate them all. When I see them drive past, as they go to show themselves off at the cricket matches, with their gilded hair and their false smiles, leaning back in their coroneted carriages with their silken skirts spread out, I smile to think how their beauty would pale before mine; and then I vow to go out into the world and fight them with

their own weapons ; and make them afraid of me, and jealous of my power. I will win that which makes life worth having—money. Who would care to live in insignificance, obscurity, and poverty? Who could even exist with such surroundings as these?” she said, taking in with a sweep of her white hand all the faded furniture and shabby adornments of the little room.

Guy shrunk from her involuntarily. The hard realism of her nature revolted him. The manner in which she seemed to appraise and value her own beauty, setting no store on that which all womanly women hold as a gift beyond price, but as a means of winning money—made him shudder.

“Child,” he said, remembering that she was young, though she looked in the full prime of womanhood, “have you no heart, no feeling, that you speak like this?”

“Do I speak so strangely?” Celia answered with a smile ; “do I differ so much from the high-born girls, your equals, who daily sell themselves for gold? It is their trade, their profession ; they lay themselves out to win some man, no matter how old, how wicked, so that he is rich, and then they give themselves in exchange for money

or title. It's a fair bargain—don't you think so? So much flesh and blood for so much gold and worldly honour; and the world smiles on them and gives them glory while it, and you, condemn such as I, who would only use my youth and beauty in the legitimate pursuit of my art. There is only this difference—the matrimonial market is not open to me with my soiled name and low parentage—who would bid for me?—so I'll make a name and a reputation for myself." Celia paused, and Guy looked at her amazed.

He asked himself, how could this girl, shut up as she had been, have gained so much worldly knowledge; how could she have come to know so well the full value of the power she possessed? He forgot that even in her small world there were men—singing, French, and Italian masters, &c., with whom she had associated. Who was it who said truly that if looking-glasses had never been invented, beautiful women would have read their own beauty in the eyes of men quite as clearly as in the truest mirror that ever reflected lovely face? And so, even in her daily walks, taken with due circumspection and under careful surveillance, Celia Ragoni had not failed to attract

observation; and she would have learned that she was beautiful in the eyes of passers by, if by no other means.

"You say I have no heart, no feeling," she continued, drawing nearer to him, and placing one hand upon her heaving bosom, with a melodramatic air. "What have I to do with such things? Who has ever taught me what love means? Cruelty and contempt are words that have meaning in my ears, but love and tenderness are but empty sounds. Who in all the world ever cared whether *I* suffered, whether *I* lived or died? You rescued me as you would a wounded bird, or some other little helpless thing, only from a humane dislike to see any creature suffer or perish—yet you," she added, her voice softening, her whole manner changing, "you are the only human being who ever cared what became of me. Were it not for you I should hate the world, and hold life not worth the living; but knowing you I know that honour, love, and truth still exist, and I cry out in my despair when I ask myself what has Celia Ragoni to do with these, such things are not for her, the outcast child of a degraded ballet-dancer."

Her face glowed with passionate emotion, and Guy, looking down at her, listening to her wild words, began to feel as if some spell was over him. The hot air seemed to stifle him, and the great eyes that blazed and burned beneath their heavy lids seemed to enthrall him.

"So you see I am far removed from the pale of human sympathy. I cannot find any happiness in the way other women find it. I—I only am a pariah—an outcast, and I must make my life for myself."

"You speak absurdly," retorted Guy angrily. "No woman can make her own life; and you speak without thought. Shut up here with these two old woman, what trial have you made of the world? You, of all others, are calculated to gain admiration and love—too much of it perhaps."

"Too much admiration, too little love," answered the girl with a bitter scorn on her face.

"And you think to improve matters by going on the stage," returned Guy with equal scorn. "You affect a knowledge of the world. Do you not know then that you would be a mark for slanderous tongues, that it would be impossible for

you, unprotected by friend or relation, to avoid in such a position the loss of your good name?"

"What have I to do with slander? Who would trouble themselves about me? Nothing to lose means nothing to fear. I have nothing to fear, because there is no loss of good name possible to me, who have none."

"Because your mother was a ballet-dancer of doubtful respectability—pardon me; it is a thing I would not have alluded to if you had left me the option," answered Guy, "is it not possible for her daughter to be innocent and pure? Celia, have some respect for yourself, if you wish men to have any for you. Do not speak of yourself so lightly."

"*I* speak of myself lightly?" answered Celia, her eyes blazing, lifting her hands in a semi-foreign, semi-theatrical way which was peculiar to her. "I did not think it necessary to keep up the sham to you, who know all about me. You have yet to learn that there is no prouder woman living than Celia Ragoni; but my pride takes another form to yours. I glory in myself—in what I am—in what I shall be——"

Lawrence interrupted her, speaking gravely. "Celia, listen to me. You think me indifferent to your future ; but since I have seen you it pains me more than words can tell to think how little I can protect you. Before I saw you I thought you might be a governess, or earn your living in some way other women do ; but now I see you I know that it is true that you are not fitted for such a life. Women are jealous," he said with a smile. "Some wouldn't have you in their houses, and those who might be above that sort of feeling would be afraid of the responsibility. You are fitted for any station ; but none the less would it be impossible for me to get you an *entrée* into society, though you are as good as any of them. There is only one plan I can think of. You are fond of singing?"

"Passionately. I have been practising in the hope of taking some part where there is singing when I go on the stage."

"That must never be. Listen to me. This is my plan. I will advertise, or in some way find a suitable companion or chaperone who will take you abroad for two or three years. I will not ask either of these people you are with now," said Guy, with a smile,

"because it is evident you don't like them. You can study under the very best masters, and society abroad is very different to what it is here. There you can mix in the world which you are so eager to join."

Celia was going to interrupt, but Guy stopped her.

"You said just now, in words that sounded too coarse for your lips, that you have none of the chances of happiness that other women have; there were none who would care to marry you. You will find out your mistake some day, Celia; you will find that beauty such as yours will win all that you desire—riches and station and love. There will be many too glad to marry you."

"Is that true?" she asked, lifting her head, a strange light in her eyes. "Would men who are far above me, like you, ever stoop to such as I?"

Guy half turned from her, and, leaning his arm on the mantelpiece, rested his head on his hand.

"When you know more of the world," he said, quietly, "my greatness will diminish very considerably in your eyes, if it does not cease to exist altogether."

Celia was silent, and a smile that was almost contemptuous rested on her lips.

Was she thinking that this, the only man she knew who was far above her, showed little proof of the truth of his own words?

"You have not answered me, Celia. Do you approve of my plan? Will you go abroad?"

"No," she replied, drawing herself up, and throwing back her head. "I will no longer be dependent on your generosity. I will not go among strangers, keeping up this farce of being a lady. I will earn my own living. It matters little to you what becomes of me. Let me go my own way."

Guy, looking at her, thought it did matter to him what became of her, more than he could have imagined a few hours ago. It was not possible for a man of his nature, with his intense appreciation of beauty, to be with Celia Ragoni, to look upon her, and not feel that she was supremely attractive.

"I only offer you the same fate I give myself. I am going abroad in a few days."

"You are going away?" said the girl, her face paling, "and I shall never see you again. Is this the only time that my eyes,

that have hungered for years to look upon a kind face, shall rest upon yours?"

"Yes. I am going; there is nothing to keep me in England now; but I shall see you again some day. And Celia," said Guy, taking her hand in his, and speaking kindly, almost tenderly, "before I leave you you will promise me this one thing. You will give up this idea of being an actress? Promise me; if not for your own sake, then for mine."

She took her hand from him.

"What right have you to ask such a sacrifice of me. You, who for eight long years have forgotten my very existence, and will go away to-day and forget it again. You, who mock me with ideas of equality, and all the while hold me in scornful pity. Who in all the world cares enough about me to say 'Celia, give up this thing for my sake, because I love you, and could not bear to see you on the stage.' There is not one—not one."

"A little while ago you spoke of gratitude in words I thought over strong for the occasion," said Guy. "If you think I have any claim on yours, give up this thing when I ask you."

"I am not ungrateful. Heaven knows how I have felt to you for your goodness," she answered, passionately. "But you ask too much, that I should give up the one hope of my life for you, who will forget that I have done it in a few days' time; you, who have only a whim on the subject, a fear, perhaps, that I shall disgrace you, because you have in some way connected yourself with me. I cannot give up so much. Leave me; let me go my own way."

"Is your own way ruin?" asked Guy.

Celia Ragoni turned on him a look scornfully imperious.

"What you call ruin I will make my triumph. People will envy me yet—*ci-devant* beggar, future actress, though I am."

Guy bent his head with a satirical smile. "Be it so. A woman bent on self-destruction is scarcely worth the saving; but in right of the small claim I did once have upon you, may I ask what you intend doing at present? You cannot burst into a full-blown actress without a moment's notice, and it seems you can't stay here."

Celia's face, which had grown hard and proud, softened. It was necessary still to bend Guy Lawrence to her will. However

angry she might feel with him for his opposition to her wishes, she must not show it, for she could not do without his assistance quite yet.

"Do not speak to me so coldly, so cruelly; do not think of me so harshly because I have not been able to mould myself to the standard of your English proprieties. Can you change the song of the foreign bird you cage into the dull chirp of your native sparrow? Do not utterly condemn me. I will try and do anything you please for your sake, only do not ask me to go abroad with a chaperone, or to try any more to keep up this pitiful pretence of being a lady. Let me be like other women, who have, like me, to earn their own living."

It was hard for Lawrence (it would have been hard for any man) to resist the fascination of her pleading.

"Tell me what you wish, and I will help you if I can."

"My singing master and his wife receive pupils, who live in their house. He gives them finishing lessons, with the view of bringing them out at his concerts. He is ready and anxious to receive me, and I have

thought sometimes of going there, if you should oppose my other wish. If you will extend your charity, on which I have lived so long, so far as to help me in this, I can live there for the present. The future can take care of itself," answered Celia; but as she spoke there was a peculiar look on her beautiful mouth that might have warned Lawrence how little she had relinquished the one idea of her life.

"And you would be a professional singer, then?" he said with a frown.

It was strange how repugnant the idea of Celia Ragoni's appearing before the public was to him. Perhaps from that feeling innate in all Englishmen which makes them dread publicity for any woman-kind in the remotest degree connected with themselves—perhaps from a dog-in-the-mangerish sort of dislike to her beauty being made a mark for other men's admiration. Most likely in any other case, had the facts been laid before Guy and his advice solicited on the subject, he would have said, "What better could she do, with her antecedents and her chances of success?" But Celia Ragoni was not a woman to be seen and forgotten, or tossed aside as a

thing not to be desired, and he could not feel indifferent to her fate. Perhaps but for the remembrance of one little piquante face, which, though it would have been dwarfed in beauty by the side of this woman's, yet had power to steel Guy Lawrence's heart against the attractions of any other, he might have listened to the voice of the charmer who charmed so wisely—he might have held the world well lost for one fair woman's sake; and in his utter weariness and distaste for all things, have given up everything for the sake of that which might be his for the asking, and—repented it ever after. As it was, he felt that the sooner he was away the better.

“What can I do?” was the answer in return to his question. Would she be a professional singer? “I cannot stay here. Would you have me beg in the streets?”

“Give me the address, then. I will make all inquiries of Mrs. Morgan and others, and if it's a proper place for you to go to, you shall. And for Heaven's sake take care of yourself; don't let me have to feel that I only saved you from one sad fate that you might come to a worse.”

“The last state of that woman was

worse than the first," mocked Celia. "Thank you, pray do not fear for me. Addio—I will go and send Mrs. Morgan to you."

"Shall I not see you again?" asked Lawrence irresolutely, holding her hand in his.

"What use?" answered Celia, drawing herself away almost fiercely. "Are you not as far removed from me as heaven from earth?—as respectability from unrespectability? Let me go."

She turned and swept away, her proud head held high in the air; but as her hand was on the lock of the door, she turned again, and with one swift movement, stood before him, caught his hand, and pressed it to her lips.

"Forgive me—forgive me. I am so proud and wicked; and yet I am not ungrateful, if you only knew."

Guy Lawrence, looking down, saw her beautiful bowed face, saw the tears welling in her eyes, saw the full lips quivering passionately. He bent his head lower and lower, and then for one moment his lips rested on hers.

It was only a passing madness, for the next he pushed her gently from him, and

Celia Ragoni, looking on him, saw the brief tenderness fade out of his face, and without a word she turned and left him.

Five minutes after, when she found herself in the bare little room—one of the attics which she was allowed to call her own—her movements were eminently characteristic. Not even to herself could she be wholly natural. She stood with one hand clenched on her bosom, the other flung listlessly by her side, a world of tragedy in her face. She might have stood for a model of Lady Macbeth, or Cleopatra.

In her blind egotism and unlimited faith in the power of her own beauty, Celia Ragoni had thought to reign supreme over the hearts of men. She had dreamt day and night of Guy Lawrence, perhaps had counted on the possibility of his falling in love with her at first sight; at any rate, had reckoned on gaining him over to her side, and bending him to her will. Now she was baffled and thwarted; not only that, there was some real feeling for this man, whom she had made her hero, raging and surging in her passionate heart. Her womanly instinct prevented her mistaking Guy Lawrence's passing admiration for any tenderer

feeling, and she could not forgive him that he had been so ready to leave her without any thought of seeing her again. She could not forgive him that he had not fallen down and worshipped her.

Then tragedy subsided, and nature asserted itself. Celia Ragoni dropped her hand, and with a swift movement (she was wonderfully like a tigress, this woman, in all her movements, graceful and soft and stealthy) stepped to the glass, and pushing back the dusky hair from her brow, examined her own face critically, feature by feature, in the little mirror. It was a long examination. She might almost have counted every eyelash in the time. Then she drew back, and a slow triumphant smile rested on her lips, as, taking a little card from her pocket, she looked at it almost lovingly.

On the card were the name and the address of a well-known theatrical agent in London. And as she raised her eyes they rested with loathing on the dreary, unsightly walls of the little room which formed so strange a contrast to herself.

"I shall be free at least," she muttered, as she thrust back the card into its hiding-

place. "There will be no one to control me where I am going as they have controlled me here; and I will work my way step by step till I make him acknowledge my power."

Was that the summit of her ambition? Was that the crowning pinnacle of all her castles in the air? and had she only yielded temporary submission to Guy Lawrence's wishes that she might have the means and the increased freedom to enable her the better to work her own will? Ay, if he could have looked on Celia Ragoni's face at that moment he would have known that he had only succeeded in making her more determinately bent on her own wilful way.

CHAPTER VIII.

NO life can be made up of action. It is impossible for any history or autobiography to give a pre-Raphaelite picture of the life of any man, for it is chiefly the great events, great joys, or great sorrows, that form the tableau. All that dull monotonous detail, that "common round of daily life," that must make so large a part of any existence, however stirring, is charitably allowed by biographers and novelists to sink into the background, or at least mid-distance.

For it is wearisome enough to have to live through so many interludes in our own lives, when the curtain is down and we have nothing to do but look at the drop-scene—*i.e.*, the aspect which life presents to our eyes at that present moment, without boring ourselves with reading of or contemplating the weariness of other people's.

Looking back, even upon the most prosaic existence, consisting only of variations on the same tune, the everlasting "hatching, matching, and dispatching," consequent on humanity, it never seems to us that our lives have been uneventful; and it is because we remember only the leading points, passing over the intervening dead level of neutral tint. For that leaves no impression, is absolutely forgotten, while our great troubles, our brief sweet happinesses stand out conspicuously, and are as present to our minds and to our hearts as on the day when they came to us.

But most sharply defined are the trouble-points, most vividly remembered the sorrows. For happiness drifts into tranquillity; every joy that does not turn into a regret subsides into a calm, and in a long calm days and months go by unnoticed, and leave only a vague remembrance, as of a peaceful dream; but keen-toothed sorrow leaves her sting behind her for ever to be remembered. Listen to a grandmother talking to her grandchild of what has been, and you will notice she will dwell most on her sorrows—they will make her dates, the pegs on which to hang her little stories.

The countless days of sameness which draw out the even tenor of most every-day existences, when we do the same things, think the same things, hope and fear the same things, are so many blank pages in our mind-volumes.

So Guy Lawrence, living by himself in Rome, thinking a great deal of the past, very little of the future, and nothing of the present, let the days pass over his head one by one, never heeding when they came or when they went.

He passed an easy dilettante sort of existence; painting a good deal, smoking and moralizing a good deal; strolling by himself under deep blue, star-lit skies; mixing a little in society, when it was not too much trouble to dress himself in tail-coated attire—the sacrifice to duty which the world expects of every man—not too great a bore to leave the rooms which he had fitted up in luxurious artistic disorder. It seemed as if he had no object in life but to please himself, and yet of all discontented Englishmen Guy was the most hopelessly bored, the most dissatisfied with the set grey life and apathetic end which seemed to be his destiny.

If it had been possible for him to sympathize with any suicide, he might have begun to understand the feelings of the morbid young person who, counting up the many days he would have to go through the routine of dressing himself, decided that it was too much trouble to live, and so put an end to his mortal career and went, it is to be hoped, to a world where clothes are not.

It seemed to him, looking back, as if all the great events of his life had been crowded into one brief period; and then, so quickly, the storm of woe and sorrow and sharpest agony had subsided, and a dead calm set in.

It is so in many lives. Year succeeds year in monotonous peace. We go round and round in the perpetual circle of duties and pleasures till, if we are young and impatient, we cry out at the dulness, and in our weariness sigh for any change. And then when the change comes, according to the old proverb, "It never rains but it pours,"—one event follows close upon another, joys or sorrows treading on each other's heels. And it may be that in sighing and tears, and heart-breaking sobs,

we repent the rashness which made us call peacefulness dulness, and forget to congratulate ourselves on the break-up of monotony. It is hard though to live without hope. Guy Lawrence found it hard enough. It is hard to look around you on your fellow-creatures, to see them filling their several places—father or mother, or husband or wife, happy in each other's love, and feel that you are but a solitary atom, a miserable scrap in the vast whole of humanity, with no particular tie binding you fast to the rest. To feel that you have missed your place in the world, have drawn a blank in life's lottery, and are no good to yourself or any one else. At such a time the creature may be tempted to ask of the Creator, Why was I created?

It has been suggested that could we, before we were born, have been shown all that would be, we should have refused the gift of Life.

But I wonder how many people there are now living who, could they have been shown all the future, would, taking the ill with the good, have chosen not to live.

It is useless to wonder, for the great charm of life lies in the uncertainty of the

future, and could we see all that lies before us, we might in our human weakness shrink from the ordeal—from its responsibilities and sorrows, and refuse even this life which we cling to so when once we have possessed it.

For though there are many who cry out in their despair, "I wish I had never been born," would they even at that moment of darkest misery be annihilated even if they could?

Not to be. It is an idea which our limited imaginations cannot grasp, so it is a useless speculation at best. It is hard enough for any of us, even the least egotistical amongst us, to imagine the world going on just the same when we are dead and laid in our graves. It seems to us as if it will be like the end of a drama when the chief actor has played his part and quitted the scene.

If Guy Lawrence had been a poor man he might have been something greater than he was—a great painter or a great author, for he had wonderful latent force, only the motive power was wanting to set him to work, and none knew better than he that without labour nothing can be achieved

that is worth the achieving. He used to sit for hours together in the gloaming when he could no longer see to paint, lounging on cushions placed in the broad windows which, foreign fashion, reached to the ground, smoking his hookah, idly dreaming, sometimes wishing that his lot in life had been a more active one. It was hard to be only able to watch and wait.

Guy Lawrence did not give way to any very overwhelming despair, or think himself anything but a victim to circumstances. He went about and lived much the same life as he had done before his stay in England, but he felt no violent interest in anything or anybody.

The freshness of life was gone for him, and the picture of the present and the future, as it lay before him, seemed to be painted in dull drabs and greys.


He would have been the last man in the world to make moan over his troubles to any friend, however near or dear, but he used to confess to himself that he had no object left in life but to be of use to his brother—to keep the vow he had made by his mother's deathbed.

He was, perforce, quiescent now.

long as Bertie was, according to all accounts (and Guy took care to gain every information he could about him), well and happy at college, he could be of no use to him, but when he should be wanted, he, Guy Lawrence, was ready and willing to come to his brother's aid.

Till then he could only wait, and the days dragged themselves on and passed slowly with a wearisome sameness that was more depressing than any acute sorrow.

If Guy Lawrence had been a good man, or even a religious man according to the ordinarily received acceptation of the word, he might have taken to work off his superfluous energies in an attempt to benefit his fellow creatures, morally and physically, by an injudicious and indiscriminate distribution of soup tickets and tracts, doing a great deal of harm to the recipients of his charity and perhaps a little good to himself. But being only what he was—a man with a strong sense of honour, an intense power of faithfulness, endurance, and strong, tender love, with very little formal religion, only an infinite belief in the divinity of Him who is over all, and shapes all things



to his own ends—he could only silently endure the sorrow which had come to him.

He could only live on, with little or no hope that anything could ever brighten his own dark life, trusting that in the time to come he might help the brother who was now the only one left to him of those he had loved.

It was now six months since Guy Lawrence had left England.

During that time he had seen little of Bertie. He had come, to use his own phrase, “to look Guy up,” when he had visited the Continent in the winter with a college friend, a young nobleman of dissipated appearance and a remarkably small share of brains. Guy had not taken any fancy to this young man whom Bertie had chosen for his friend, and had declined to join the tour which they were making during the short vacation. He was sorry afterwards that he had not sacrificed his own personal feelings in the matter, for the tour began and ended in a visit to Monaco and the gaming-tables.

There were constant requests for money in the brief letters that came to him from his brother at Oxford, requests that were

always liberally answered, but though now and then he sent a few words of warning and advice, Guy shrunk from asking questions or seeming to be a spy upon his brother's actions. There was nothing he dreaded more than that Bertie should think he made the pecuniary assistance he was able to give him a pretext for lecturing, for Lawrence had the greatest dislike to play the part of Mentor to anyone. He also trusted much to the tidings he received of Bertie through the letters of an old school friend, who was now dean of one of the colleges at Oxford.

From him he heard tolerably good accounts. Young Deverell was in the fast set, fond of horses, and kept more than most young men at college, but beyond that the Dean, who was not of the same college, or behind the scenes, knew little harm of him, and Lawrence was forced to be content; but he was never without the fear that evil tidings might come.

Of Celia Ragoni, Lawrence had heard very little; he had never seen her since that day when they had met at Laburnum Villa. All communications or arrangements about her change of residence had been made

through Mrs. Morgan, and only a brief letter of thanks had come to Lawrence from the girl herself before he left England. She had seemed to shun the sight of him, and he on his part had not sought to see her, and since he had been at Rome she had merely acknowledged the receipt of a cheque he had sent her, and thanking him for it, had expressed herself content with her new manner of life, and never hinted at any wish for a change.

But Lawrence often thought of her anxiously enough, for it seemed to him there was no hope for a woman so vain, so ambitious, and so beautiful.

Wonderfully beautiful she was indeed! Her face, with its enthralling, sensuous brilliance, would come before him still, and sometimes when he was painting, without his will, the face that he was imagining and trying to depict with a beauty absolutely distinct from hers would grow like the face of Celia Ragoni.

In vain Guy, disgusted with his own failure, would turn the picture with its face to the wall; it seemed to have a fascination for him which forced him to take it up, and, placing it on the easel, gaze at it with a sort

of dread and a half superstitious feeling that the woman whose beauty he had painted against his will would in some way haunt him—would in some way be connected with the future, overshadowing it more darkly still.

CHAPTER IX.


ON a warm evening towards the end of the month of March, Bertie Deverell and his set—a select number of young men of a sporting tendency—were together in his rooms at Oxford, smoking and drinking and playing at cards.

One or two of them, with their half-tipsy, rakish looks, would have seemed more in place in the tap-room of a public-house, for the rooms (the atmosphere of which was stifling with the fumes of tobacco and the smell of brandy) were fitted up with every costly luxury.

Velvet lounges of every sort and shape were scattered about; specimens of rare old china, Palissy and the like, stood on marqueterie tables; mirrors, extravagant with gilding, and pictures, some of them bijoux by well-known artists, hung on the delicately-tinted walls, and in juxtaposition with

rough sketches of actresses and race-horses. It was a strange medley. There were foils and silver-mounted pistols, swords, guns, spurs and whips of all kinds; and there were statuettes in marble, carvings of exquisite design and richest workmanship. There were claret-jugs and silver drinking-cups, Sèvres tobacco-jars, cigar-stands, pipes of all kinds, meerschaums in every stage of colouring, briar-roots, hookahs and chibouques, race-glasses, French novels with yellow covers, and torn copies of sporting papers; and these were all hustled together in admired confusion, whilst in a corner far out of sight, a number of books, evidently not in requisition, were piled together on the floor.

There were five men in the room: one, leaning back on luxurious cushions, was lazily watching through half-closed eyes the little wreaths of smoke, as they ascended from the dainty cigarette he held between his strong, white fingers. He had long, sleepy eyes, a fair, drooping moustache, and a weak mouth with some defect in it which made it seem as if it would never shut, and in combination with a rather low forehead, caused one to doubt whether the intellect of



the man was in proportion to his size—six foot three, and looking it every inch as he lay there stretched out on the velvet cushions.

But the sleepy eyes took note of something more than smoke, for all their languor.

“Devilish near thing that, Deverell,” he drawled out.

He was watching a game of *écarté*, and the players were Bertie Deverell and Harvey Pearce, a man with a broad, low forehead, small, deep-set eyes, and massive jaws—a cross between a bull-terrier and a prize-fighter. His was not a pleasant face to look upon, or one that made you feel inclined to trust its owner. Harvey Pearce was the hardest drinker and the hardest rider then at Oxford—a horse-dealer spoilt. He was smoking a short pipe, taking deep draughts between the deals from a tumbler of brandy-and-soda that stood near him, and playing his cards with a face unmoved by any changes of luck; only now and then lifting his little sharp eyes to his opponent.

“Your deal, Pearce,” said Bertie, pouring some champagne into a tumbler and draining the glass with eager thirst. Bertie Deverell was terribly altered. The bright

freshness of his face was utterly gone. His haggard, bloodshot eyes, with deep black marks underneath them, pallid cheeks, parched, feverish lips, and trembling hands, all told unmistakeable tales of hard living, late hours, and dissipation. The innocent fearlessness, the bright youthfulness, which had once made Bertie Deverell's face such a loveable one, had given place to a reckless, devil-may-care *insouciance*.

He was handsome enough still, with his delicate chiselled features, the stamp of high-breeding and gentle birth not yet effaced from them; handsomer, perhaps, in the eyes of women, who cannot admire a face, however beautiful, which has not a story written on it, than in his first youth, or than he had been six or seven months ago: but it was a beauty of another sort—not the beauty of honesty and freshness.

Two other men watched the game—men I call them by courtesy, for one was a mere youth, a nobleman by birth, though there was nothing very noble about his appearance.

Lord Leath looked as if he had been washed in very strong soda and water and all the colour taken out of him. He had

light hair, light eyes, with an eye-glass stuck in one of them, light drab complexion, and very light moustaches and whiskers, just visible in a very strong side light. He was very weak in the legs, very weak in intellect, and very much impressed with his own acuteness in turf matters.

His dress was flash in the extreme. Shirts of large patterns, a preponderance of horse-shoes wherever they could by possibility be introduced, very tight trousers, and very close-cropped smoothed-down hair produced the desired effect, and Lord Leath was often mistaken for his own groom. It was an old joke among his friends, and one on which he rather prided himself, that riding one morning at an unusually early hour into Rotten Row, he had been peremptorily ordered out by the park-keeper and told that "grooms weren't allowed to hair their 'osses in the Row."

The other was a sharp, wiry little man, with a cunning, satirical face and two redeeming qualities — one, his intense admiration and affection for Bertie Deverell; the other, his pluckiness and staying powers across country. However badly he might be mounted, you might be sure Harry Law-

son, by hook or by crook, would be in at the death unless he killed himself or his horse by the way.

They were all "horsey men," these friends of Bertie Deverell, from Bob Bentham, who lay with his long legs stretched out on the sofa, to the weak little lord who was bending over Pearce's shoulder and betting eagerly on the game.

"Five to one on Pearce," he lisped out. "It's all up with you, Bertie, my boy. Unlucky at cards, you know—eh?"

"Done," growled Lawson; "and hold your jaw. How can a fellow play while you're talking such infernal nonsense?"

Lord Leath turned the eye with the glass in it in weak astonishment on the speaker.

"My dear fellow—weally you should be—aw—a little more moderate in——"

"Hold your tongue!" roared Lawson. And the other with a few "Weally you knows," subsided into quiescence and dumbness. The game proceeded in silence, and for a few minutes there were no sounds but the shuffling of the cards and the puffing of cigars and pipes.

"King!" said Pearce.

"Hang the king," said Bertie.

"High treason," drawled Bob Bentham.

"You might have played that last hand better, Bertie, my boy."

"Impossible, my dear fellow. Shuffle the cards, Pearce. The luck's dead against me to-night."

And again there was silence.

"Game!" said Pearce, turning up another king, and darting one triumphant look from under his heavy eyebrows at the loser.

"Confound the cards!" said Lawson, who had been backing Bertie throughout the game. "Fortune's a lady without much taste; she seems to bestow her favours on Pearce."

"Thanks for the compliment," said Pearce.

"That's thirty-five pounds to you, Pearce. Haven't any ready — I was cleared out last night — so you must take paper," and scrawling an I O U for the amount, Bertie tossed it across the table and turned to light a cigarette.

"It's to be hoped your luck will turn, old fellow, before the race, or things will begin to look devilish queer for you and me too," said Lawson.

"Don't growl, *mon ami*," said Bertie, carelessly. "If you are beginning to funk, you can hedge, you know."

"Not a bad idea! I wonder who'll take him? Two to one against Rattlesnake. Will you, Pearce?" said Bob Bentham, with a queer look in his long, sleepy eyes. Something in the look or the tone seemed to irritate Harvey Pearce.

"My book is made," he answered sullenly.

"And I'll not hedge a penny," shouted Lawson, disregarding the by-play. "I stand to win or lose with Bertie."

"All right, old fellow," answered Bertie, with his old careless laugh. "He's as safe as the Bank."

"With you up, perhaps," said Bentham, "but that horse has a devilish queer temper, and if anything were to prevent your riding, Bertie, I'd not give a brass farthing for his chance."

"There isn't a fellow in College could ride Rattlesnake but you, Deverell; it's splendid, by Jove! to see you on him," put in little Lord Leath. "It's wonderful—terrible the way that horse pulls, I assure you—'pon my honour, you know—I got on him once, wasn't on more than five minutes, and he

didn't give me the trouble to get off; both arms, pulled out of their sockets, ached for hours after, not to speak of bruises—yes, 'pon my word—you know."

"He wants a good deal of riding, but he's easy enough when you're used to him," said Bertie.

"Best horse I've come across for a long time," said Bentham; "he'll want careful handling, and then I hope he'll pull us through. By Jove! I shall be sold if he doesn't; and you too, Bertie. You've been losing heavily at cards, if I'm not mistaken. My boy, you'll excuse my interference, but I've been watching your play, and you're scarcely a match for Pearce; not so cool, less experience, and all that, you know."

Bertie flushed, for he piqued himself on playing a good game.

"A fellow can't contend against such luck as I had to-night," he said, rather angrily. And he turned to the table, and filling a glass half full of brandy, added a few drops of water, and drank it at a draught. It seemed as if his thirst was insatiable.

Bentham watched him.

"Draw it mild," he said, as Bertie put

down the empty glass. "You're not going the way to win, my dear fellow. It's impossible to ride when you've been liquoring hard the night before. Unsteadies your hand, makes you seedy, and takes away your pluck. Things will look awfully fishy for us if your hand shakes on the morning of the race as it does now."

"All right; don't you trouble yourself. There's a whole day and night to pick up in."

"Well, it's your own look-out," replied Bentham, knocking the ash from his cigarette into a delicate porcelain dish. "You stand to win or lose too much on this venture to run any risk through want of resolution to stop your liquor for a day or so."

"Not much fear. A little brandy never did any one any harm," said Pearce, who had been puffing away in silence.

"Not much fear for you, perhaps, Pearce," retorted Bentham. "You're devilish close about your affairs, but according to all accounts you've not backed Rattlesnake—rather the contrary."

"Well," answered Pearce, with a swift glance of his small eyes, "I've not got

much on the race, it's true—only a trifle; but I can't afford to bet as heavily as some of you."

"Indeed!" said Bentham. The tone was almost insolent in its incredulity, but for some reason best known to himself Pearce did not resent it. Perhaps he did not care to provoke a quarrel which would involve plain speaking, or throw any light on his affairs just at that time.

"By Jove!" said Percy Leath, speaking under difficulties, with a huge regalia in his small mouth. "Rattlesnake will carry us through—see if he don't. Back Deverell, by gad!—best rider ever saw."

"I know a better," said Bertie, quietly.

"Who?" asked Lawson, who for some time had watched Bertie with a troubled countenance. His suspicions roused by Bentham's words, he could not fail to note in him terrible signs of weakened health and nerve, induced by fast living.

"My brother—Lawrence—capital fellow he is: rather slow, but he has the best seat, lightest hand, and the coolest dare-devil pluck of any man I know."

"Very pretty, fraternal affection," sneered Pearce. Bertie darted an angry glance at him.

"How goes the enemy?" interrupted Bentham, taking out his watch. "Who's there? Hope you sported your oak, Deverell. I'll bet that's one of the Masters or Deans coming to pay you a visit. Always poking their infernal old noses where they are least wanted."

Bertie went to the door.

"Open the door, Bertie," said a voice outside.

"By George! it's Guy. Talk of the ——— Come in, old fellow; how the deuce did you turn up?"

And Guy Lawrence, with his sun-browned, healthy face and genial smile, came into the room and shook his brother warmly by the hand.

There was a slight awkwardness for a short time. The new comer was so clearly not one of them, that Bertie's companions felt a certain restraint in his presence. But Guy was for once determined to make himself agreeable, and it wore off. He joined them in smoking and talking and drinking, and before half an hour had passed they would all four have agreed in voting him "a devilish good fellow."

It was not possible for these men, whose

thoughts were all engrossed with the steeplechase which was to be run the day after the morrow, to keep the subject out of their talk; and Guy soon picked up from the not very lucid descriptions which they were all eager to give, all there was to learn.

Such disjointed phrases as "thundering good horse;" "Aylesbury steeplechase;" "crack riders;" "bought him of old Toms, the dealer;" "splendid condition;" "stiff post and rails;" "first-class jumper;" "safe to win;" "lumped it on;" put together, gave him a fair idea of the real state of things.

Lawrence volunteered no opinion on the subject either way. He only with his watchful eyes took note of the change in Bertie, and there was scarcely a look or a word that could give him any insight into the characters of the men who were with him, that escaped his observation; but most of all, his eye lingered on Harvey Pearce.

A little later they all rose to go; but Lawrence remained.

"Turn in, Bertie, and get some beauty sleep," was Lawson's parting injunction.

"Have another weed, Guy. Where do you put up?" said Bertie.

"Thanks. Hard by — at the Mitre. How are you, my boy? I've not had time to inquire—all right?"

"Right enough," replied Bertie; "but where did you come from?"

"I was tired of my own company, so I thought I'd give you a look-up. By the bye, what's this about the steeple-chase? What put it into your head to ride? I didn't know you went in for that sort of thing."

"Too much trouble, generally," answered Bertie, with a yawn, "but you see I bought this horse of old Toms. I wanted one, and he was going deuced cheap. And then some of the fellows got their eye upon him, and wanted me to enter him at Aylesbury and ride him myself. They generally send two Oxford men."

"And you've backed him very heavily?" asked Guy.

Bertie turned round impatiently. "That's the worst of being dependent. It gives people a right to pry into your concerns," he said, angrily.

"Nonsense," said Guy; "isn't that a question any man may ask of another?"

and I only asked for your own sake — because——”

“Because what?”

“Because I don’t think you’ll win.”

“And why the devil don’t you think so?”

Guy looked at Bertie, and made no answer for a moment. Then he laid his hand kindly on his brother’s shoulder.

“Do you think you’re in good condition for riding, Bertie?” he asked, quietly; “you’ve not been living the sort of life that fits a fellow for that kind of thing. How will you be to-morrow morning, for instance? A night of drinking and smoking in a room close as this, isn’t the best way to make a man’s hand steady—or his nerve either.”

“There’s lots of time to pick up before the race,” said Bertie, sullenly.

“A day and a night—for this is nearly gone. Well, it’s no good saying any more. If you can’t get out of it you must make the best of it; but I tell you plainly, I wouldn’t give much for your chance.”

“It’s just the way to encourage a fellow and give him confidence (which is half the battle), to croak like that, isn’t it? Shan’t

I win? You'll see. A pretty thing to sell all the men who have backed me!"

"Have they all backed you—those men who were here to-night?" asked Guy. "That man Pearce, for instance, has he got much on the race?"

"Well, I don't know—only a trifle; I believe he's hard up, can't afford to bet heavily—at least, he says so," added Bertie, thinking of the many round sums he had lost to him at *écarté*.

"Ah. Had he anything to do with your buying this horse?"

"He went over with me to see him, and recommended me to buy him. Deuced good judge of horseflesh is Harvey Pearce—can't take him in," said Bertie, twisting his little golden moustache.

"No, I should think not; rather the other way, Bertie," said Guy. "Unless I make a great mistake, that man stands to win on your failure. I watched him to-night, and every glass of brandy that you took he felt himself nearer to success.

"Good heavens, Guy! What do you know about it? You're wonderfully clever, no doubt; but it so happens that Pearce bets very little—if at all—on any race."

"Doesn't he? Well, you know, a looker-on sees more of the game, and I came fresh amongst you. But I'm quite ready to own myself mistaken when I find that I am. Good-night, Bertie. Turn in; I won't keep you up any longer. I'll look you up in the morning." And then the brothers separated, and Guy Lawrence wended his solitary way to the hotel.

The next morning Bertie Deverell did not appear either at chapel or lecture; but his absence was such a usual occurrence that it excited no remark.

Guy Lawrence, coming into his rooms about eleven o'clock, found him sitting, attired in a gorgeous dressing-gown, shivering over a roaring fire, though the morning was wonderfully warm for the time of year.

"Got the ague, or something," he said, ruefully, as he shook hands with Guy.

"You do look awfully seedy, to be sure," said Lawson, who had popped in, as he explained, in an interval of hard study, to see what had become of his friend. "Don't let it get wind, or they'll be funky about the race."

"D—— the race!" exclaimed Bertie. "Leave me alone: I shall be all right. It's

that confounded wetting I got the other day by the water."

And so Lawson departed with a long face, and Guy was left to administer what consolation he could under the circumstances.

"Leave the brandy alone, Bertie," he said, as his brother took up a bottle with a shaky hand. "That wont set you right. I'll go for a doctor."

"No, you shan't. I wont have that nasty croaking old Sawbones come pottering about me," said Bertie.

"You'd better let me go," answered Guy; "it's your only chance."

"Put down the blind, will you? I can't bear that horrid sun in my eyes," said Bertie, irritably. What an altered face it was, with blanched cheeks and haggard restlessness on every feature! As the sun rested on it the few faint rays were almost unbearable to the bloodshot eyes that had once been able to meet the brightest glare, but which were now scarcely able to discern the figures in the betting-book.

"I say, Guy," Bertie said at last, breaking the silence which had fallen upon them --for Lawrence felt almost too depressed to

take the pains to hide the shock which the alteration in his brother caused him—"If you think it will be any good, I'll see a doctor. It—it's awfully hard lines, you know, to fall ill just at this time, with all the fellows backing me; and did you know that confounded old nuisance Captain Lorton has come over for the steeplechase and brought Kitty with him? She's to be there, and she's going to wear my colours. It will be hard to fail. I shall hide my face for ever if I break down. They'll say I funkcd."

"Kitty Lorton here!" exclaimed Guy.

"Not here. At a farm-house a few miles from Oxford. He did have the sense not to bring her into the town for all the fellows to stare at. But of all the idiotic, senseless things for a man to do—to bring a girl to a steeplechase of this sort. I'd rather, Guy—I'd rather shoot myself than let any of them—my friends, you know—have the least idea that I had anything to do with that disreputable old ruffian. He came pottering here one day, and I promised anything to get rid of him. So the next day I went over to see Kitty. She had the sense to know the whole thing was

a mistake. There is an old lady with her to play respectability, and stay with Kitty at the race—I suppose when Captain Lorton is in the ring—a disreputable old beggar!—aunt, or cousin, or something of Lorton's. Hang the whole concern. I wish the old cad had been strangled before he came here."

"I suppose you don't include Miss Lorton in your vituperations—you're not ashamed of her?" said Guy, sternly.

"No, but she ought to have known better than to come. I wouldn't have the fellows here know of my engagement for the world—they'd never stop chaffing; and the daughter of that horrible old snob, too."

Guy looked at his brother with something very like scorn as he thought how little he should have been ashamed of Kitty Lorton if she had been engaged to him.

It was true enough that it was a great mistake for her to come here. But no doubt she had not been able to help it. So thought Guy, and he was very near the facts of the case.

Captain Lorton, to whom every race or steeplechase was as a loadstone and he the steel that was drawn to it, had made up his

mind to come to Aylesbury, and thought to combine two things—the looking up of Mr. Bertie, who in his opinion had been rather remiss in his letters and attentions to Kitty, and the hope of sport.

Moreover, on the principle that there are as good fish in the sea as have ever come out of it, he thought that Kitty's presence on the scene, would not only influence her present lover's cooling ardour, but might gain her others among Bertie's grand college friends, to whom he would probably introduce her.

But it seemed that Captain Lorton's calculations were wrong there, for Bertie not only resented his fiancée's appearance in the vicinity of Oxford, but showed no intention of bringing her forward in any way.

As for Kitty, her life was absolutely stagnant at Erlesmere, and she had given way out of sheer weariness of soul, caring too little about Bertie to think whether he would be pleased to see her or not. If she had seen any symptoms of displeasure at her presence in his manner during the few minutes he had favoured her with a visit when he rode over from Oxford, she would have been quick enough to resent it—glad enough perhaps of an excuse for breaking her en-

gagement. But Kitty had seen nothing of the sort. For the short time Bertie had been with her, he had been lover-like enough to satisfy the most exigeante, and had forgotten all his vexation in the presence of the girl he did really love, in his own way.

"If you wouldn't have the fellows know of your engagement for the world, I wonder you like Miss Lorton to wear your colours," said Guy, with an uncontrollable sneer.

It was hard that the girl whom he had given up at such bitter cost to himself should be spoken of with anything like disrespect.

"There'll be plenty to wear my colours, I dare say," answered Bertie, with a half-smile. "She wont be the only one."

And then Guy went out to search for a doctor, and left Bertie to his own reflections—not pleasing ones, to judge by the expression of his face.

"They'll say I funk'd," he muttered once between his closed teeth, "and I'm ruined unless the horse runs."

Towards evening Bertie picked up, and all his hopes revived.

The same men who had met at his rooms the previous evening, met there

again, but the drinking was more moderate, and there was scarcely any play going on ; all interest was centred in the race ; that alone was the topic discussed, and whatever fears Bertie's friends and backers might have on the subject they kept them to themselves.

No one appeared to have any doubt that violet-and-white would show first past the post.

They separated earlier than usual, and Guy left Bertie when the others did ; a great fear possessed him that his brother was more ill than he chose to acknowledge, and that he would not be able to ride on the morrow.

Continued dissipation had undermined Bertie's strength, and a neglected cold, caused by a thorough wetting, had turned to a sort of ague. Hot and cold fits succeeded each other, and left him weak and debilitated. What hope was there that he could ride a horse which according to all accounts required much management ?

Guy Lawrence was so anxious that he could not sleep, and before dawn he found his way to his brother's room. Having with difficulty awakened the slumbering

gyp, he stole noiselessly into the sitting-room, but he found the door which communicated with the bedroom thrown wide open, and looking in saw Bertie lying on the bed half dressed.

"Guy, I was coming to you," he said, half raising his head, and looking at his brother in a strange, bewildered way, "but I couldn't get dressed—there—there's something the matter with me—and there's the race, you know. If I don't ride, I'm ruined—ruined, Guy; do something, don't stand staring, for pity's sake — get the doctor."

"I'll go for the doctor, Bertie," answered Guy, kindly. "Get into bed—it's no good bothering yourself about the race. You must give it up—you're not fit to ride."

"Give it up! good Heavens, are you mad?" shouted Bertie, raising himself and glaring fiercely at his brother; "would you ruin me, would you have me sell all the fellows who have backed me? Here, give me the toggery—hurrah for the violet-and-white! who says I can't win? Rattlesnake for ever!" and his eyes flashed with the unnatural lustre of fever, as he raved rather than uttered these incoherent words.

"Lie down," said Guy, in a calm tone. "It isn't time to dress yet, even if you ride and—it's no use deceiving you, Bertie—you can't do it. If you were to attempt to mount a horse you would fall off. You can't stand, much less ride."

"Give me some brandy—brandy will pick me up."

"You shan't have it. You are killing yourself, Bertie," answered Guy, who saw that the fever was making him more and more incoherent. "Listen to me. Don't you know any man who can take your place?"

"There's not a fellow in Oxford who could do it. Don't think of thwarting me. I'm bound to ride, and by Heaven I will if I can hold the reins."

"Be quiet, old fellow——" began Guy, soothingly.

"If the horse is scratched, I'm ruined. You don't know Guy. I was sure of winning; it's all this cursed ague."

The fever was passing now, and the shivering fit which rendered Bertie yet more utterly prostrate, was coming on.

He sank back on the bed, and gradually his eyes began to close, the muttering ceased, and he fell into a heavy sleep.

Guy stole gently to the window and drew down the blind, for the first streaks of early sunlight were falling across the bed and on the haggard face of the sleeper.

The morning of the long-talked-of race had dawned, but Bertie lay there deprived of the strength wherein he had boasted, and Guy Lawrence stood by the bedside looking down on him with a sorrowful face.

The bright, handsome boy, his mother's darling, lay there so changed and helpless ; and he who had promised him help and succour in all time of need, what could he do now ? He remained there for a few minutes, in silence and deep thought, and then he turned away with a heavy sigh and crept noiselessly from the room.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Bertie woke in the morning he seemed so much refreshed and so far recovered that he refused peremptorily to listen to Guy's entreaties that he should give up all idea of riding, and insisted upon setting off for Aylesbury at once.

Guy, finding further remonstrance useless, held his peace, only suggesting that he should accompany Bertie.

They arrived there in ample time for the "Undergraduates' Plate." A fly took them to the course, where their appearance was hailed by vociferous demonstrations from Bertie's sanguine partisans, who crowded round the champion about to do battle for their Alma Mater. Bertie struggled, with the innate pluck of his race, to appear calm and confident, but though he assured them that it was "just a walk over, you know—simply a moral," his anxious, flushed face belied his words, and caused many and sore

misgivings amongst those who knew the cause.

"But how's the nerve, Bertie?" asked Bentham, seriously. "Ah, don't grow impatient, old man; it isn't pluck that I mean—no fear of your showing the feather—but you've got ticklish work cut out for you to-day: not merely sticking on, like a monkey in a circus, but work for a firm wrist, and what's more, a cool head. Now, you know——"

"Well, old chap, cut it short," interrupted Bertie, impatiently; "what *are* you driving at?"

"Nothing much, Bertie; only I don't think your style of training is good—that's all."

"You don't, eh? All right, we'll put you up next year and feed you with a bottle and pap-boat."

Beyond raising his eyebrows languidly, the laugh that greeted this speech had little effect upon Bentham's calm, immovable temper.

"Come, cut preaching," drawled Leath, sucking at a huge regalia. "'Pon my honour, you know, it's rather good for you to give Deverell riding-lessons."

"Don't speak with your mouth full, but stick to your weed, little 'un," replied Bentham, in a slightly sarcastic tone; "it's about as much as you can manage—without being sick."

Leath stuck his glass in his eye, gazed at Bentham for a few seconds, and then quietly subsided.

"By Jove, though, Bentham's just right," remarked Lawson, who had joined the group a minute or two previously. "You look seedy, Bertie—most awful seedy; hardly in form to take it out of that devil Rattlesnake."

"Only a slight headache, my prince of croakers," replied Bertie; "barring that, I was never fitter!"

"Headache or not, you haven't an ounce to give away, I can tell you. There's Billy Thornhill from Trinity going to ride for Cambridge, and he'll take a deal of beating you may take your oath, even if he rides a clothes-horse, which he wont."

"What sort of thing is this Satanela that he rides?" asked Bertie.

"The most dangerous-looking black mare I've set eyes on for some time; belongs to a man called Newcombe."

"Newcombe?" asked Guy, who to this time had been anxiously watching Bertie. "Any relation to the Newcombe who owned *Rigoletto*?"

"Son, I believe," said Lawson, who had also been ruefully regarding Bertie's altered appearance.

"Stable companion of a St. Leger winner," added Guy, seriously. "She'll be likely to turn out dangerous."

"Not a doubt of it," said Bentham; "she's in the paddock, come and have a look at her, Bertie."

"All right," replied Bertie, with a careless laugh. "I shan't have a chance during the race, unless I look behind me. Gee-up, old man—come along, Guy."

Guy was about to follow them, when he espied in the crowd an old college chum, who, though he had left Oxford ten years before, never failed to be present at any gathering of the 'varsities, on river, racecourse, or cricket-ground.

"Excuse me, Bertie; there's Mugford. I haven't seen him for years. I'll wait here—see you when you come back."

Guy was striding through the crowd towards Mugford while the others went on

their quest for the dreaded black mare, when suddenly a hand thrust out from a group of betting men seized him and he found himself confronted by Captain Lorton. So utterly changed, so repugnantly dissolute, so fearfully degraded, had he become since their last meeting, that Guy involuntarily withdrew his hand and shrank from him with a gesture of disgust; but trifles such as these were little likely to affect the sensitiveness of the Captain, whose skin had become tolerably hardened by constant rubs with the world.

"Hullo, Lawrence, my boy—you here?" he cried in a familiar tone that was peculiarly offensive. "Why, curse me if it ain't quite a family gathering—fancy us all turning up! I've got Kitty here somewhere—come to see Bertie win, you know. Where the deuce has she got to? Oh, there she is. Here, Kitty, here's your future brother-in-law."

Hiding the annoyance that the man's manner caused him, Guy turned his head hastily to where Kitty was standing, attended by a coarse, gaudily-dressed, common-looking woman.

His face flushed crimson as he saw her

amidst such a gathering, and heard the comments that her presence elicited from the crowd.

Very pretty she looked in Bertie's colours, violet dress and cape edged with delicate white fur, and tiny bonnet, with white lace trimmings to match, perched on her chestnut hair. Her cheeks were bright with excitement, and her eyes were sparkling with animation at the strangeness of the scene; with something more—with anger and scorn, for she had seen Guy Lawrence before he had seen her, and had noticed how he had shrunk from her father's vulgar greeting. Her lips curled with disdain as she coldly extended her small, daintily-gloved hand to him.

"I scarcely expected to meet you in such society, Mr. Lawrence. Don't you fear the contamination?"

"If you can go through the ordeal, Miss Lorton, I am likely to pass unscathed. Don't you think so?" he answered, quietly.

"Oh, I'm learning to bear these things. Constant rubs with the world make one thick-skinned, you know. A rudeness even almost fails——"

"A rudeness?" exclaimed Guy, in a sur-

prised tone, "who would dare to show you rudeness?"

Her eyes flashed scornfully, and she was about to reply, when a hand was laid on Guy's shoulder and a cheery voice behind him exclaimed, "Hullo, Lawrence! saw you engaged, but couldn't risk losing you. How are you, old fellow? Fancy seeing you here! Don't know why I shouldn't, all the same. Do you know Beresford?" he continued, alluding to a fast, roughish-looking man who accompanied him. "Why, of course; you were up at Oxford together; same college too, now I think of it,"

"I knew Mr. Beresford then," said Guy, with an emphasis on the last word, as he bowed slightly, "but we haven't met since."

"More's the pity, Lawrence, if you are generally so favoured," replied Beresford, with a cool, insolent stare at Kitty. "Wont you introduce us?"

Instead of replying, Guy turned to Kitty, his face flushed with annoyance.

"Here is your father, Miss Lorton. I must go and look after Bertie. Good-bye." He held out his hand, but she, instead of taking it, bowed to him with frigid hauteur, and turned away.

Mugford saw that Beresford's company was a restraint upon Guy, and so seized the first opportunity to shake him off.

"What's up between you and Beresford?" he asked. "I thought you used to know him."

"So I did," answered Guy, "until I caught him rooking poor little Georgie Fielding at billiards—but that's too long a story to tell you now. Let's go and see this horse of Bertie's; it's kept at a farmhouse half a mile from here. Do you mind coming with me?"

"Not the least, if you'll carry me when I'm tired."

"This Rattlesnake seems to be fancied. Do you know anything of him?" asked Guy.

"Nothing whatever," replied Mugford, "except that he is described as having the speed of a racehorse with the temper of a devil. But your brother is a good rider, of course?"

"I scarcely know a better—rather rash perhaps, but a perfect horseman."

"Well, if he's anything like yourself he'll do. Do you do anything in that way now? By Jove! it seems only yesterday that you cut down the Pytchley field. Don't you re-

member? that day we found at Cottesbrook Spinnies, thirteen miles in fifty-eight minutes; only three at the finish; yourself a good first. Fastest thing I was ever in."

"Yes, I remember it well," said Guy, with a smile of pleasure at the reminiscence.

"And that day at Brampton Wood when you pounded us in old Wurzle's field? Gad, Lawrence, my blood ran cold when I saw you go at that leap—a six-foot ditch with an oxe, hard as iron, staked and bound, into a lane not eighteen feet wide, and the same thing on the other side. Don't you remember it? But you did it and got away. Teddy Holmes tried it and it cost him a two-hundred-guinea horse and a broken collar-bone. Are you up to the old form now?"

"Well, I scarcely know. I was only a youngster then—so full of my horsemanship that I forgot my horse. I should know better now."

By this time they had reached the farm. In the yard they saw, leaning against the stable door, a groom, who touched his cap as they approached.

Guy immediately recognised him as having been in service at Erlesmere, before Bertie left for college.

"You here, Saunders?" he said, entering the stable; "I want to see Mr. Bertie's horse."

"All right, sir, he's here all safe and sound. Take care, sir—don't get too near his 'eels; he's got a nasty way of letting out, and he ain't in the werry best of tempers this morning."

Guy scanned him attentively. He was splendidly formed: long-bodied, close-ribbed, full of blood and muscle, powerful loins, a great width of barrel, a small racing-like head, and strong, clean, short legs. He looked thoroughbred all over; but with all this he had a nasty roll of the eye and a way of throwing his ears back at the slightest sound that unmistakeably showed the lurking devilry in him.

"What do you think of him, Saunders?" asked Guy, after he had surveyed him a few minutes.

"Barring accidents, sir, he'll win—there's only two horses besides him in the race: Tom Tit, a grey that's a good fencer, I hear, but can't never stay a three-and-a-half mile course; the other is Mr. Newcombe's mare, Satanella. She's a clinker, there ain't no two ways about that, and wont make a bad

fight of it ; but if Rattlesnake don't go into her tantrums she can show 'em all a clean pair of 'eels."

"Well, you wont come to grief for want of condition, Saunders."

"Nor for want of proper handling, Mr. Guy. As I said before, barring temper, sir, we'll about pull through."

"We shall see," said Guy, going out of the stable. "Come, Mugford, let's go and look up Bertie. By the bye, Saunders, don't bring the horse down till the last moment—you say he's not over amiable to-day, and the crowd might frighten him."

"All right, sir."

When Guy and Mugford reached the ring they found Bertie still the centre of an admiring crowd. Some, who had stood his horse, looked anxious at his excited, flushed appearance ; whilst others declared vehemently that it was "the greatest moral going"—that nothing in the world could prevent him from winning.

Amongst the latter was Lawson, who looked daggers at any one who questioned Bertie's infallibility, and was ready to do battle then and there on behalf of his chosen idol.

"You talk as if you knew all about it," he said, in a tone of contemptuous pity, to a man who expressed a doubt as to Bertie's coolness. "Why, I flatter myself I can ride a little, but I just *don't* ride, that's the difference; I only push my horse along, put him at his fences and we blunder over—as likely to come to grief, as far as judgment goes; and that's the case with most of us. But that isn't riding. Look at Deverell now: he knows to a nicety what a horse can do; he can tell to an inch how much jump is left in him, and if it's there, by gad, he'll get it out of him. That's my idea of horsemanship. *You* prate of coolness—he hasn't enough to teach his grandmother to suck eggs, as you do. Go back to Hampstead Heath, Moffit, my innocent, and learn a little more, for that's your riding-school, I should imagine."

At this moment Pearce approached. As he scanned Bertie, a look of satisfaction spread over his face.

"Hullo, you fellows!" he said; "let's have a look at our gentleman jock. You're like a hungry pack—by Jove, they'll eat you, Deverell, if you don't whip 'em off."

"Not such hungry curs as to fatten on our friends," said Bentham, pointedly.

Pearce cast a savage look at him.

"No," he sneered, "you're more like jackals: Deverell's the lion that's to have the pickings. You're only waiting for your share of what he leaves."

"Well, I suppose you're in the swim—aren't you, Pearce?" said Lawson. "You've backed Bertie's mount, of course?"

"Rumour says not," observed Bentham, coolly.

"Rumour's always an awful liar," said Pearce, with a somewhat constrained laugh, as he turned on his heel. "Never believe her, old fellow."

Bentham followed him with a look till he was lost in the crowd. "If that fellow isn't a scoundrel," thought he, "his looks don't do him justice."

Meanwhile, Pearce plunged into the betting ring, and after looking about him for a few moments, walked up to a bullet-headed, bull-necked individual attired in a dirty white scarf, fox-head pin, a cutaway horsey-looking coat, and tight trousers; who, a placard on his white hat informed the world, was "Bob Smithers, of Manchester;"

a small book and pencil which he held bespeaking him a betting man. As Pearce approached he was shouting frantically, "Six to four on the field! six to four I'll lay. Two to one, bar one. What'll you back, Captin?"

"What are you making favourite?" asked Pearce.

"Rattlesnake—six to four."

"What are your odds about Satanela?"

"Two to one."

"I'll take four ponies to two."

"All right, sir," replied Mr. Smithers, busy with his pencil. "Again?"

"Once will be enough, thank you," answered Pearce. Then as he turned away, entering the bet in his betting-book, he cast his eye down the row of figures.

"How do you stand, Pearce?" asked a rakish, dissipated-looking man; dressed in a very shiny flat-brimmed hat, which he wore on one side, a loose double-seamed driving coat and check trousers. "Have you peppered the Oxford crack pretty freely?"

"Yes, rather," replied Pearce, with a laugh. "I win two hundred and sixty pounds on the mare, and lose one hundred


and eighty on Rattlesnake — not a bad look-out that, considering Deverell will drop off before he's gone a hundred yards, if he ever gets on. If you are right about Satanella, we shall do."

The excitement amongst the adherents of the two universities became more intense as the time for the race approached. Bertie's face flushed with the agony of his anxiety, his head swam with delirium, and he showed unmistakeable signs of a rapid fever. Then, as the fear seized him that he might not have strength for the task before him, his excitement increased, his hand trembled, and his lip blanched.

All these changes were marked by Guy, who watched him anxiously, a sad look of pain overspreading his grave face.

"I've been over the course, Deverell," said a tall, manly-looking youth, who had just joined them; "there's an awkward double rather, before the run in; don't dream of flying it—it looks easy, but it's about impossible——Why, Bertie, old fellow, are you ill?" he exclaimed suddenly.

Every eye was turned anxiously on Bertie; who, in attempting to move a few



paces had staggered, and would have fallen had not Guy supported him.

"It's nothing, nothing much, only a slight giddiness. Get me some brandy and soda, plenty of ice—quick!"

The consternation of the group was great at this critical state of things, but though most had betted heavy sums on Rattlesnake, but one feeling existed amongst them—one of concern for Bertie Deverell's health. "You can't ride, Bertie." "Give it up, old fellow." "It would be madness." Such remonstrances proceeded from all around directly they saw that he was really ill.

"Have you heard about that cad, Pearce?" cried Leath, running up.

"No—what?" from a chorus of voices.

"He's been betting against Rattlesnake; a man I know saw him do it in the ring—awfully low, you know, isn't it?"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Pearce came up.

"Well, Deverell, are you better, old fellow?" said he, with a malicious gleam of the eye; "you don't seem quite the thing—perhaps the gallop will do you good."

The marked silence with which this speech

was received showed Pearce that something was amiss.

"Why, what's the matter with you all?" he asked; "has the crack broken down?"

"You will be sorry to hear he was never fitter," answered Bentham. "Why, Pearce, what a Croesus you must be to bet against him."

Pearce's face turned scarlet, but recovering himself, "That's just what I'm not," he said, with a forced laugh, determined to put the best face on the matter. "I've heard such wonderful things of Newcombe's mare, that I've just hedged a trifle to save my book."

"If you've any bets on Bertie you'd like to lay off," said Lawson, contemptuously—"we're not getting nervous, you know, Pearce—I'll take sixty pounds to forty if you like to lay it."

"No, no, old chap," said Bertie, in an under tone, catching him eagerly by the arm. "Do nothing of the sort; I'm awfully bad, much as I can do to stand. I see his game now—he's at the bottom of it all." Then to Pearce, "I hope you stand a good stake on my breakdown, Pearce?"

"I don't understand you—why should

you hope so?" blustered Pearce, confusedly.

"Because nothing short of it would compensate a gentleman for turning blackleg."

"What do you mean?" roared Pearce, turning white as a sheet, whilst the commotion amongst the bystanders was great in the extreme.

"Hold your tongue, Bertie," whispered Guy; "are you insane?"

"My meaning is simple enough," went on Bertie, now perfectly maddened with the combined effects of rage and fever; "it's you who've brought me to this state—it was you who plied me with drink to win your cursed money. But you haven't succeeded yet, and if I can sit in my saddle, by God, you shan't!"

The excitement of this paroxysm was too great. His head reeled, his eyes grew dim, and he seized Guy's arm to support himself. At this moment the bell rang for the course to be cleared for the "Undergraduates' Plate." Some of the riders had weighed and were already parading themselves before the stand.

"Come, Deverell," shouted one of Bertie's adherents, rushing up breathless, "they're

asking for you in the weighing-room. Look alive, old fellow—there's not much time to lose."

Loud and earnest were the remonstrances urged on all sides, but Bertie's natural stubbornness, aggravated by his conviction of Pearce's treachery, made him turn a deaf ear to them.

"You can't do it, Bertie," said Guy; "it's no use, young one, you are too ill—far too ill."

"Don't talk stuff!" returned Bertie, savagely. "Sell all the fellows, and be the laughing-stock of Oxford—I'll die first!"

Guy did not attempt to reply, but walked with him in silence to the weighing-room, accompanied by Lawson, Leath, Bentham, and five or six others.

"Now, Mr. Deverell," said the clerk of the course, "all weighed but you, sir."

"Off with my coat, Guy—steady—steady—Oh, Guy, hold me up! That cursed giddiness again," and he staggered as if he would have fallen.

"Bertie, listen to me," said Guy, sternly, but in a tone unheard by the bystanders; "you shall not ride this race. I know the temper of the horse you were to ride; in

your state it would be madness to attempt it—worse than madness, it would be suicide.”

“It’s three o’clock, Mr. Deverell,” said the clerk of the course, looking at his watch, “time to be at the post.”

Bertie turned from him to Guy with a pitiable look of entreaty. “You know I’ve backed Rattlesnake for such a pot—a regular hatful, Guy.”

“Would money repair a broken neck? Will money give you back your life?”

“And then Bentham, and Lawson, and all those fellows have stood Rattlesnake. If he doesn’t run they lose a heap of money.”

“He shall run,” said Guy, calmly.


Bertie looked at him in surprise.

“But who’s to ride him?”

“I will.”

“*You*, Guy?” cried Bertie. “You! Oh, Guy, why did I never think of this before? You can win: you *will* win;” then turning to the others, “Here, Bentham, Lawson, it’s all right; Guy’s going to ride, and we’ll pull it off, yet.”

“Now, sir, if you’re going to weigh,” said one of the stewards, “be good enough to look sharp.”



Great was the satisfaction with which Bertie's words were heard, for Guy's fame as a cross-country rider had gone before him amongst his brother's set.

"But what about leathers, Guy?" asked Bertie, with a blank look; "you couldn't get mine on."

"All right; I've provided for emergencies."

As he spoke he unbuttoned his overcoat, and taking off a pair of loose leggings displayed a very workmanlike get-up of breeches and boots.

"Now, then, Bertie, off with your jacket," he said, while Lawson and Leath arrayed him with a pair of cruel-looking hunting spurs that he had taken from his pocket. "That's it; now the cap."

And Guy stood before them in full racing costume, wearing Kitty Lorton's colours — violet-and-white: to do battle for them, to uphold them, for his brother's sake.

When Guy was slipping on his overcoat, after having gone through the form of weighing, he called Bentham aside.

"Take Bertie into the stand at once," he said, "and keep him as quiet as you can

—he's very ill, and this excitement will make him much worse."

Just then, a stable-boy who was looking out for Guy, hurried up to him. "Please, sir, Saunders sent me to say as he's afeared the crowd might frighten Rattlesnake, so I've been and taken him a little way up the course."

"All right; show me where he is—quick."

In a few minutes they came up to Saunders, who was leading Rattlesnake ready saddled, his dark chestnut coat shining like satin, and looking all over the pink of condition.

"Well, Saunders," said Guy, "how's his temper now?"

"I'm blest if I quite know what to make of him, Mr. Guy, beggin' your pardon," replied Saunders, sticking his head on one side, and contemplating the object of their solicitude with a knowing look. "He's a rum devil, and no mistake; he wouldn't let me go near him an hour ago, and now he's that quiet an infant might manage him."

"So much the better," laughed Guy.

"I was werry glad when the boy came

and told me as you was a-going to ride, sir, because Mr. Bertie, though werry clever, is a leetle bit hasty. Rattlesnake's all werry well just now, but I wouldn't trust him ; I know his tricks. Above all, Mister Guy, don't use the whip if you can help it—he goes wild directly he feels it. I tried it once, and I wished I hadn't."

"He's a handsome brute," said Guy, scanning him closely.

"He's a rare good 'un—there's no mistake about it; goes like a greased flash o' lightning—strong as a cart-horse too. You're five pounds over weight, sir, I dare say, but that wont make any difference on his back, if you can only keep it there."

"You think we'll have a fight for it?" said Guy as he jumped into the saddle. "So, steady! All right then, one of us will get the worst of it—that's all. Give him his head."

"You know the course sir, I suppose?" said Saunders, walking by his side ; "there's one rayther awkward jump, a five-foot ditch and a bullfinch—nothing out of the way particular, but a werry nasty thing to blunder at. Besides that, a double post and rails before the run in, which ain't werry

much neither, as there's plenty of room to pop in and out, except that the posts is rather stiffish. There ain't nothing else worth speaking of."

The others were already at the starting-post, so Guy gently shook the reins and cantered up, Rattlesnake going without the slightest show of temper. But this state of things was not to last long—it was only the calm before the coming storm.

Forming into something like a line, they walked towards the starter. There were only four of them: Tom Tit, a good-looking grey with handsomely-turned quarters, but rather light thighs, and knees too far from the ground; Kate Mellon, a weedy bay mare with great want of girth, and in fact, no great point, but a rather handsome head, well set on; Satanella, the much dreaded black mare, with a head and neck that were perfection, splendid barrel, but if anything hocks a trifle too small for her size; and last, but not least, Rattlesnake.

To start four runners in a three-and-a-half mile steeplechase is no difficult matter. The flag was lowered and they were off.

They sailed away at a tolerably easy pace across the first field and over a low fence,

Kate Mellon taking it slightly in advance, Rattlesnake a length behind everything, Guy having taken a pull at him to look at his opponents.

He saw at a glance that danger was only to be feared from Satanella, who had all the appearance of a splendid fencer.

Knowing the wonderful strength and staying power of Rattlesnake, he determined to force the running, so giving the chestnut his head, in a few strides shot in front. In this order they came to the water jump, which Kate Mellon refused, the others getting over without a mistake. The bay having declined three times, her rider retired from the race, now leaving only three to fight it out. Away they pounded, the splendid stride and pace of Rattlesnake beginning to tell upon the grey; the black mare, however, keeping close upon the chestnut's haunches on the whip hand.

Across a turnip field and a flight of hurdles, the heavy ground telling more and more upon the grey, then landing over a fence into two hundred yards of ridge and furrow, bordered by a bank with a five-foot "yawner" on each side—an obstacle that was negotiated safely by Satanella and Rattle-

snake ; the grey, however, not so fortunate, failing to clear the ditch on the other side, slipped, and fell on his haunches, throwing his rider and nearly rolling upon him.

The race was now left to Bertie's chestnut and the black mare, both going splendidly and making for the "oxer" straight before them. Guy was diverging slightly from his course to take the leap at a spot he had fixed upon, when, passing a cluster of stunted trees, an urchin perched among the branches waved a handkerchief tied to a bough, accompanying the act by a cheer. In an instant Rattlesnake threw back his ears, swerved so suddenly as nearly to unseat his rider, struck out his fore-legs, and threw up his haunches.

When he reached the ground Guy tried to calm him by voice and hand, but his temper was aroused, the devilry that had been slumbering burst out in all its fury, and he shook his head and snorted with passion.

Guy saw that the tussle was now to begin, so sitting firmly in his seat and pulling his cap over his eyes he drove his spurs into the chestnut's flanks. With a mad bound Rattlesnake jerked his head forward, striving to

take the bit in his teeth, but finding the attempt ineffectual, reared almost upright, pawing the air with his forelegs. Guy threw himself forward, and by his weight brought him to the ground, trembling in every limb with passion.

There was no time to be lost if the race was to be won; the case was desperate, so Guy determined as a last hope to bully him. Collecting the reins in his grasp, he raised his whip and lashed the now maddened brute again and again between the ears. With a bound he dashed madly on towards the fence, seeming scarcely to touch the ground in the wildness of his flight. Guy tried vainly to hold him—he was away, so gripping the saddle firmly, and setting his teeth, he awaited the result.

Nearer and nearer they approached to the fence; it was the one of which Saunders had warned Guy, a five-foot ditch, and a rather tall, stiffish-looking bullfinch on the farther side. They were only forty yards from it, but the chestnut showed no signs of relaxing his speed. Now thirty, and Guy pulled at his head with all the strength of desperation, but he might as well have attempted to arrest an avalanche. Twenty

yards only separated them from the fence ; it was too late now to think of stopping. Ten ! Guy stuck his knees into the saddle, and with a rigid look on his face prepared for the shock.

They were now only a single stride from the ditch. Guy lifted the chestnut to the leap, but Rattlesnake, in the blind madness of his career, utterly heedless of his rider, came with all his force against the fence, and breasting the tightly-bound branches, fell head foremost violently to the ground. Guy was shot out of the saddle by the concussion, falling heavily some yards before his horse, where he remained perfectly motionless

Saunders, who had been watching the race from this point, sprang forward and caught Rattlesnake's bridle, as he scrambled up ; then hurrying towards Guy, knelt by his side and raised his head, which was covered with blood flowing from a wound in his forehead.

"Mister Guy! Mister Guy!" he cried out anxiously, "are you hurt much, sir? That's better, sir," as Guy opened his eyes and after looking round vacantly regained

his feet. "You've had a nasty purler, sir, and no mistake."

Guy seemed now to have collected his senses, and catching sight of Satanella, now only a field ahead—the pace at which Rattlesnake had come having reduced much of the distance lost—shouted excitedly—

"Quick, Saunders! help me up. Not a word! Now—that's it. No, never mind the whip—I can't hold it," and Guy was once more in the saddle.

The faint sound of a cheer from the stand, as this incident was witnessed, made his blood flow quicker, his pulse throb more rapidly. In desperation he thrust his spurs up to the rowels into Rattlesnake's flanks and pressed madly on.

The chestnut, somewhat cooled by his severe fall, seemed to have spent his temper. His turn of speed and wonderful staying powers now told, and when Satanella reached the next fence Rattlesnake was barely a hundred yards behind.

But Guy's chance seemed hopeless, and would have been so had not Satanella, stumbling slightly, refused. Thornhill, however, keeping her head resolutely at it, got

her over. This delay had considerably decreased the gap between them. Rattlesnake was only thirty yards behind, both making for the last jump, the double posts and rails, before the run in. Guy casting a quick glance at Satanella, and seeing that she was scarcely distressed, knew that it was useless to attempt to race her down in so short a distance.

They were within fifty yards of the posts and rails, and Thornhill was beginning to ease Satanella for the double. Then a sudden idea occurred to Guy—it was a desperate, an insane thought. By rushing the leap and taking it at a fly he could perhaps reach the mare, as the difference in the pace might close up the gap. It was the only chance of winning, and Guy, with the reckless desperation of a gambler, determined to hazard it. Satanella now got over, Thornhill popping her in and out in splendid style. Then, with brow knitted and teeth clenched, Guy pressed on, the gallant chestnut seeming to fly through the air. One last vigorous plunge of the spurs, and Guy lifted him to the leap.

Meanwhile the excitement in the stand was intense. Bertie, flushed with anxiety,

his cheeks burning with the hectic glow of fever, was watching every incident of the race through his glass, while near him were Bentham, Lawson, Leath and others of his set, forgetting in their eagerness the *blasé* manner it was usually their fashion to affect.

When Rattlesnake bolted, the excitement burst beyond all bounds. "He's gone away with him!"

"No, Lawrence holds him!"


"He doesn't, I tell you—the chestnut's bolted! Good Heavens! he'll never clear the fence—a good five feet at least."

"He's rushing it!"

For a second every voice was hushed as Rattlesnake rose to the leap, and then a cry burst from every lip, as horse and rider came to the ground.

"He's killed!" shrieked Bertie, his lips blanching with horror. "Oh, God, what have I done!" he moaned, burying his face in his hands.

A deafening cheer from the crowd made him lift his head eagerly, and he saw Guy regain his feet and remount the chestnut. "He'll do it now," shouted Lawson. "Will he? I'll lay three to one, four to one—a



hundred to twenty on Satanella!" roared a bookmaker. "Put that down to me," shouted Bertie. "Again?" "Yes." "I'll lay it again!" bellowed the bookmaker. "Done!" cried Lawson, in response, "the race isn't over yet. The chestnut's picking up!" "Nothing but an accident can give it to him." "The mare's refused! Rattlesnake wins!" "No! Bravo, Thornhill! he's got her over." "What a pace! how Lawrence lifts his horse along." "Thornhill's easing her for the double." "Steady, Lawrence, steady! By Jove, he'll blunder! Take a pull at him, man." "Easy; good Heavens! he's going to fly it!" "He's mad! Fifteen feet if it's an inch, besides the posts and rails." "Now, Thornhill—well done! he's over! Splendidly done, by Jove!" "The mare wins!" "Satanella wins!" "Not yet: Now for it, Lawrence. He'll never do it! Now!—NOW!"—— And a cheer that shook the stand burst from every mouth, as Rattlesnake, rising to the leap, cleared both posts and rails, shooting forward like a bolt in the wake of Satanella. "The chestnut wins!" "Rattlesnake wins!" "No, the mare!" "The chestnut!" "No! no! he'll never reach her!" "Twenty

strides more!" "Satanella!—the mare wins! Satanella wins!" "No, she don't—the chestnut reaches her!" "Rattlesnake!" "Satanella!" "Rattlesnake!" "Rattlesnake!" "*Rattlesnake!*"

He had caught her on the post, and won by a head.

Amid the deafening cheers of the spectators, Guy rode into the enclosure—deadly pale, blood trickling down his forehead, and his jacket bedaubed with mud.

Dismounting at the weighing-room, with saddle, bridle, and martingale on his arm, he got into the scale. Then, as the welcome words "all right" were uttered, cheer after cheer, louder and louder, rose from the crowd that had collected to congratulate him.

Only one man stood silently apart, trying in vain to hide his annoyance, savagely biting his moustache. That man was Harvey Pearce.

"Oh, Guy, Guy, I wasn't worth all this," cried Bertie, springing forward, and in his excitement throwing his arms round him.

Guy uttered a slight cry of pain, as he disengaged himself.

“Steady, Bertie! I’d do more for you than that, young one. It wasn’t so very——”

His voice faltered, his brain reeled, his lips turned ashy pale, and he fell heavily to the ground.

He had fainted. His arm was broken.


CHAPTER XI.

IT was a fair spring morning, seeming all the fairer and brighter after the long dreariness of winter.

April had come, and with its sudden showers and fitful sunshine was "weeping itself to May." The earth was awakening from her long torpor, and shaking off the "dreamless sleep which held every future leaf and flower."

The green buds were swiftly unfolding their bright emerald wings, the grassy meadows and banks of glittering yellow flowers rivalled the dewy tints of the fresh green leaves in the hedgerows, and the little streams and brooklets danced and sang over the shining pebbles, under the newly awakened smiles of the long sleeping sun.

The atmosphere was so bright and clear, the blue sky, only flecked with lightest



pearl-grey clouds blown softly along by little puffs of freshest air—that the birds were trying their new songs, and swelling their little throats in their efforts to out-do each other, and their bright gladness made poor little Kitty Lorton ashamed of the sadness and discontent that was in her own heart, as she sat perched on a stile and listened to them.

This bright morning had tempted her to wander farther away than usual, for she had grown very dull and stay-at-home lately, but everything looked so beautiful to-day; she felt as if she should like to throw herself down in her favourite attitude under the trees, and watching the little clouds drift by, dream away the long slow hours.

For Kitty Lorton was a very idle young lady. She had no good but tiresome relations to admonish her or bother her by advising her to do something useful all day long, and I am not sure she would have done it if she had.

When she had been happy, she had been willing enough to employ herself, though it was generally in the way of amusement; everything had seemed to be nice and “jolly” then. Now everything was depressing, and

wasn't any use when it was done—singing, for instance. Lady Caroline used to admonish her to cultivate her voice and tell her it was impossible for any one to sing without practice. *Eh bien*, Kitty was willing enough, and would sing by the hour together.

Glad, cheerful songs seemed but the outpourings of her joyous little heart, and the sad ones were charming in their very sadness. Now she would sometimes try to sing, but the happiness seemed to mock her, and her voice would break and fail at the sorrowful parts.

“ ‘I wish that I were dead, but I'm no like to die,’ ”

sang poor little Kitty, and then the tears would come; not that she particularly wished to die, but she was sorry for herself that the gladness of a life which she had so thoroughly appreciated should be taken from her.


Putting aside love-troubles—and Kitty Lorton hated to think of herself as a love-sick young lady—what had she to make life happy, and worth having, like other girls?

A short time ago, she had a kind friend who was like a mother to her; a gay young

companion, whom she had been very fond of before he began to indulge in sentiment; a beautiful house, wherein she spent each day, surrounded with every luxury; and a horse to ride.

Kitty was fond of riding; she would have liked to live on horseback, and she never was so happy as when she was going at a good pace, on the pretty little thoroughbred that Lady Caroline had given her.

The horse was Kitty's own, but Captain Lorton would not keep it at the Grange, and indeed had no stable that was fit to put it in, the whole place was in such a state of dilapidation, so Bayard was left at Erlesmere; and though Lawrence had given most particular directions that one of the grooms should call every morning at the Grange, and should hold himself in readiness to ride with Miss Lorton whenever she should require him, Kitty in her pride and anger did not choose to be indebted to Guy Lawrence for anything, and thus she seldom or never availed herself of the opportunity of riding, though it made her heart ache to think of Bayard eating off his head in the Erlesmere stables, when she might be on his back, forgetting her troubles in



the enjoyment of her favourite amusement.

So Kitty punished herself rather than let Guy Lawrence think she was dependent on him for anything — rather than feel that she owed any pleasure to his kindness.


It was not much wonder that Kitty Lorton, mentally comparing herself with other girls, thought her own life an exceptionally sad one. Each day she more keenly missed the kind friend who had taken compassion on her loneliness, who had so pitied the motherless child of a drunken father.

If Kitty had stood in need of pity then she stood much more in need of it now. She was, in her girlhood, more in want of friends and companions than ever she had been in her childhood.

Daily, the tipsy, scheming old gambler, who was her only relation, her only associate, drank himself a step nearer to the grave. Daily, he threw off some more of the little restraint he had imposed upon himself, the small attempt to appear respectable, and lapsed more hopelessly into an abyss of blackguardism. Sometimes he would be out for days and nights together,

and then Kitty had the house to herself, and preferred even the terrible loneliness to her father's presence. Was it possible that a child should feel anything but a shrinking, almost a loathing, for such a parent? The pitying, compassionate love Kitty had once had for him had died an inevitable death—it could not live under such provocation. For Captain Lorton had not even the redeeming quality which sometimes characterizes such men. He had no love for his own child. He would scheme and plot for his own future aggrandizement through her, and in some such hope—perhaps in some fear that “the young fool Deverell” would slip through his fingers—he had taken her to the vicinity of Oxford; but he was absolutely destitute of any tenderer feeling, or of any consideration for what she thought or felt.

Sometimes he would fill his house with companions who were little or no better than himself, and the poor girl would rush out to escape from the sound of their wild revelry, their frightful language, and their coarse mirth; and then, when it was night, creep up to her own room, and locking the door, sit trembling lest in some drunken



fancy Captain Lorton might choose to call her down into their midst.

She was very brave about most things, but the sight of her father when he was in the state in which he usually was now, had power to make her shiver and tremble with a horror which was not all born of fear.

It was not wonderful considering all these things that Kitty Lorton found herself utterly desolate, or that the people round Erlesmere, great and small, should hold themselves aloof from the daughter of such a man as Captain Lorton.

Sometimes Kitty would look with envy at the groups of merry girls whom she encountered in her rambles among the fields and lanes, taking walks or rides together—the inmates of some of the country houses around Erlesmere—and listening to their happy laughter wish she were among them. Even the village girls, who had fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers and friends, seemed to be better off than herself. But she was too proud to make any sign, or try in any way to ingratiate herself with any one, and she knew too well how scornfully she was regarded even by those girls whom she had met as equals at Lady Caroline's



house or at the county balls, where she, Kitty Lorton, who was nobody now, had once been the belle, and well received as the chosen friend of one of the greatest ladies in the county.

Scandal always attacks the friendless, and she, with her pretty face, her disreputable father, and her reported audacity in becoming engaged to one of the young men at the great house, was a mark for many busy tongues.

She told herself that she did not care, and that her sorrows were too real for her to trouble herself about such trivialities as these; but if she had had friends and companions she would not have had so much time to brood over her cares, and she would have been happier and better accordingly.

As it was she was absolutely alone, and terribly weary of the sad and useless life which seemed to have fallen to her as her portion in this world.

Of what use was it for her to busy herself about household matters, as some other women did? Kitty asked herself. The disorderly household and all its belongings were utterly hopeless and beyond the power of redemption. She had tried once, in one



of her desperate attempts at doing her duty, to produce some alteration in the management, but she had only brought down a storm of indignation at her interference, and had desisted ever since.

Of what use for her to practise her music, her singing, or any of her pretty, lady-like accomplishments? Did not they seem utterly out of place and accordance with her surroundings, and who would take any pride and pleasure in them now?

Of what use to array herself in her pretty dresses—Lady Caroline's gifts—and carefully coil the chestnut hair in wonderful intricacies? Who was there to see and admire her now? Who was there to care how she looked and what became of her?

Did no thought of Bertie Deverell, the man to whom she was engaged, her future husband, come into all Kitty Lorton's musings over the present and the future?

Yes; and with the thought of him came the worst trouble of all, for she told herself that she had done wrong, she had deceived him wilfully and persistently, and no good could come of it.

Many and many a time Kitty Lorton started up as if stung by the remembrance

of her shortcomings, and clasping her hands in a fit of sudden repentance vowed that she would tell Bertie Deverell all the truth and break off her engagement. She would remember how Lady Caroline had loved this, her youngest son, and feel full of remorse at the thought of her own falseness.

But then again she would grow hard and bitter, and feel no pity but for herself. If she broke off this engagement, what hope was there for her in the future? It was her only chance of release from the miserable life she was now enduring, her only prospect of better things. She tried in vain to think what would become of her if she severed the only tie which bound her to any other human being, in all the great sorrowful world.

If she married Bertie Deverell he would take her away from this wretched home. She liked him quite well enough to feel no repugnance at the thought of a life spent with him, and in the gay, bright world, in which as his wife she would be honoured and sought after—no longer despised and disliked as the friendless Kitty Lorton—she would have no time to be sorrowful, or

to regret the man she had loved and who had treated her so badly.

And moreover Kitty had never doubted that Bertie Deverell loved her truly and well, and that it was in her power to make him happy if he married her—never doubted it until that day of the Aylesbury steeplechase; but in that moment of supremest bitterness, when she had seen an involuntary flush rise to Guy Lawrence's face as Captain Lorton had extended his hand to him in the ring, Kitty, looking from one to the other and noting the contrast in their appearance, had realized for the first time the sacrifice that Bertie Deverell or any other gentleman would make in marrying her.

In her morbid sensitiveness she greatly exaggerated the extent of the degradation which attached to her as the daughter of a man whom any gentleman would be unwilling to acknowledge as an acquaintance.

She was too proud and too honest to be ashamed of her own father, but she mentally vowed that no consideration of her own interests should induce her to marry Bertie Deverell.

In giving him up she felt that she gave

up all hopes of a happier life, but she told herself it must be done, and Kitty was not a girl to hesitate when her own pride was concerned.

Sitting on the stile, her little child-like face propped on one small hand, her sad eyes gazing far away into the distance, she made up her mind that as soon as she could see Bertie, she would try and tell him that a marriage with her was not desirable, and that she wished their engagement to be at an end. But still she rather wanted to put off the evil day.

She knew that Guy Lawrence and Bertie were both at Erlesmere now. The latter, slowly recovering from his illness, had expressed no wish to see her yet, but the dread that she might at any time be called upon to see him had rather hastened her going out, and led her footsteps away from her usual haunts, farther out into the country that spring morning.

Kitty shrank from telling Bertie Deverell the whole truth, and had almost made up her mind that it would not be necessary to undeceive him altogether; she could manage to break off with him without acknowledging that she did not love him, never had

loved him, even though she had given him such reason to believe she did.

To undeceive Bertie would be to undeceive Guy—for he would naturally hear all about it—and then all that she had done for the sake of misleading him, all the sins of which she had been guilty rather than let him think she had thrown him her love unasked, would have been sinned in vain. And Guy Lawrence, hearing that she had broken off her engagement with Bertie through want of love, would, in the vanity natural to mankind, believe that it was love for himself which prevented her from marrying his brother. The scene in the library would recur to his mind, and perhaps he would laugh to himself over the silly girl who was still making a fool of herself for his sake.


“Never, never—he shall never think that,” said Kitty, in a paroxysm of shame and anger at the mere thought. “I will find some other plea for breaking with Bertie, and if I can’t, I’ll marry him and risk the consequences. It may be wicked, but I can’t help it.”

So she argued to herself, with all the contradictoriness of a woman and the wilfulness and waywardness of a child. Poor little

Kitty! all the old love that had rushed back to her heart when she had seen Guy Lawrence carried away from the racecourse helpless and suffering, only made her more indignant against him for his treachery, more ashamed and angry with herself for still loving him.

A pretty little picture she would have made as she sat there on the stile, deep in thought, the gentle breeze ruffling her *crêpe* chestnut locks, and bringing a soft bloom to her delicate face, which had been strangely pale of late.

Such a dead stillness reigned in that remote spot which Kitty Lorton had chosen for the scene of her reflections—a stillness only broken by the twittering of the birds or the murmuring of the tender green leaves as they bent their heads and whispered together. One or two young half-fledged thrushes, emboldened by the prolonged silence, hopped and fluttered at Kitty's feet, but she never heeded them, though the birds and the trees and the flowers had grown to be her companions and friends now; and she was far fonder of them in her solitude and sadness than ever she had been in the time of her gaiety and mirth.



Then they had seemed to her but as the pretty background to a picture in which she and a few others were the prominent figures.

The flowers and the ferns and the luxuriant grass were a soft carpet for her feet, the waving trees with their entwined branches were a canopy for her head—nothing more. But lately she had grown to love them for themselves; to see a separate beauty in each; to feel that she and they understood one another, and were companions in solitude.

But Kitty did not heed them now. She was trying to solve the problem of her own life, and it was too hard for her. She grew tired of thought, she had been thinking—thinking till her head ached. She pushed back her hat, and gazed up into the clear bright sky, feeling, as I said, almost ashamed of herself for her sadness, when God had made the world so bright and fair.

There was a rustling of leaves, a crackling of branches, and a man, bursting his way through the thick brushwood and tangled weeds, jumped over the low hedge from the wood on the other side and alighted close behind the stile; then becoming suddenly aware of the proximity of the little grey

figure seated thereon, gave vent to a smothered exclamation.

Kitty, after one tremendous start of surprise, kept her back turned with a pretence of unconsciousness which was very well attempted, but was not eminently successful, as the small portion of a cheek which was visible to the new-comer was dyed a deep crimson, and unless she had been stone deaf or in the magical sleep of a fairy princess she could scarcely have been unaware of his very noisy appearance on the scene of action.

I think if Guy Lawrence had been at all taken in by Kitty's little artifice, and had thought it possible to pass her unseen, he would have been glad enough to do so, for he was not prepared to meet her so suddenly ; as it was, he could only make the best of it, and he came to her side and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Miss Lorton?"

"How do you do?" said Kitty, extending an ungloved hand and averting a grumpy little face. "I do wish people wouldn't come behind one and startle one so."

"I thought you didn't see me," answered Guy, with difficulty suppressing a smile ; "but if I am 'people,' I must apologize for

my intrusion, and if I had known any one was sitting on the stile I'd have given warning of my approach. Were you meditating, Miss Lorton? I hope I haven't broken the thread of your reflections?"

Kitty was cross, for of all things she hated to be made fun of; so she answered, with an attempt at severity—

"It would be a good thing if more people indulged in meditation, as you call it. They wouldn't do and say so many foolish things; but I wasn't—I was only resting."

"No; you can't have done many silly deeds to repent over, in your short life," said Guy, with a wistful yearning in his eyes as they rested on her sad little face. A yearning which Kitty never saw, for she kept her own eyes persistently fixed on the ground.

It's a hard thing to keep up a conversation when the person you are speaking to persists in preserving a grumpy silence, and snubs all your well-meant efforts. And so Guy found it, but having once seen Kitty he could not tear himself away from her just yet.

"Did you enjoy the steeplechase, Miss

Lorton?" he asked, willing to give her another trial.

"Enjoy it? I should think not," answered Kitty, fiercely. "I'll never go to another as long as I live: noise and bustle and swearing and betting and—and people breaking their arms!" with a swift glance at the tall figure resting against the stile, with one arm in a sling.

"Poor 'people!' they are always doing something to offend you," said Guy; "perhaps they wouldn't have broken their arms if they could have helped it. Speaking for myself, I'm sure I wouldn't."

"But I'm glad—oh, so glad you won!" cried Kitty, in a sudden burst of enthusiasm at the remembrance, and looking for the first time straight up into his face; and then meeting the quick answering light in his eyes, averting her own. "That is, of course, for Bertie's sake; he would have been so disappointed if you had lost."

There was a silence after these last words, for it seemed to Guy Lawrence they were intended to remind him of the great gulf there was between them.

"When are you going to see Bertie?" he said at length. "He was speaking of

you, wishing to see you—but he is still too ill to get out. Wont you reverse the usual order of things, and come to see him?”

“When your brother wishes to see me, no doubt he can ask for me himself,” answered the girl, coldly.

“He was going to write to you to-day, but he is still very weak, and he begged me to ask you for him. I told him I wasn’t sure I could, but now that I have seen you, wont you let me convey his message to you? He has been awfully ill; so he thought it was not a case for the usual ceremonies, and you would waive them and go to him, instead of waiting for him to come to you. The sight of you would cheer poor Bertie up, and it can’t seem strange to you to go to Erlesmere, it is so much like your own home—indeed it seems more rightfully your home than mine, who have been so much away from it.”

So spoke Guy—in his loyalty asking this favour for his brother as eagerly as he would have asked it for himself.

Perhaps it was that which irritated Kitty beyond endurance, and put the spark to her smouldering anger. She turned on him a face full of passion.

"Is your brother, like you, ashamed to come near us—ashamed to own us?" she asked.

Guy looked at her a moment in sorrowful wonder.

"I do not understand you. Can you know what you say, Miss Lorton?" he asked, quietly.

"Will you deny it?" she went on, scarcely heeding in her passion what she said. "Will you tell me that when my father held out his hand to you on the racecourse you did not shrink from him—you did not feel ashamed to own him? Do you think I did not understand you just now, when you said you had told Bertie you were not sure you could deliver his message? Do you think I did not know that the great, rich Mr. Lawrence was afraid to come to our house—afraid to be thought the friend of one who has sunk so far beneath him as Captain Lorton?"

Kitty paused, unable to proceed from the fierceness of her excitement, and stood with flashing eyes and quivering lips.

"No man alive should dare to speak to me as you have done, Miss Lorton; but you are a woman, and must be pardoned,"

said Guy. His face had grown very white and he was gnawing his moustache, as he was apt to do when he was very angry. "You accuse me of the worst of all meanness—of cowardice. You have strangely altered since I knew you, to be capable of such thoughts."

"Yes, I *have* strangely altered," said Kitty, catching at his words. "The world has taught me many a hard lesson; among others, that I, Kitty Lorton, am no fit wife for an honourable man."

"Who has dared to say such a thing to you—to put such a notion into your head? Kitty, you must be mad: you are full of morbid ideas and fancied slights."

"I have learnt that a marriage with me," said Kitty, interrupting him, scarcely hearing his words, "is a social and moral degradation for a gentleman in your position. Heaven knows if I had been told this sooner no power on earth would have made me promise to marry Bertie. But it is not too late. I am only waiting to see him to tell him he is free, that nothing—nothing should ever induce me to be his wife."

"Would you sacrifice all his happiness and your own because some foolish, malicious

person has put absurd ideas into your head? Tell me who it was!" cried Guy, fiercely.

"Who?" said Kitty, looking straight at him and speaking slowly. "There were many who said I was designing and artful, and had taken advantage of Lady Caroline's kindness to 'catch' one of her sons, but I never heeded them. I thought they were spiteful and jealous. I thought myself your equal, until you taught me to the contrary."

"I?" said Guy, advancing a step nearer to her, and looking at her so sternly that she drew back half frightened. "You say I taught you?"



"Yes; I have told you how. When I saw you shrink from my father—no, don't deny it, for I won't believe you—all the truth came upon me like a sudden flash of light. I knew then for the first time that we—he and I, for I cannot separate myself from him if I would—were outside the pale of society, and then I remembered that though you had come to speak to me and deigned to notice me when I was alone, yet when your friends came up to you, and one of them asked to be introduced to me, you pretended not to hear, and making some excuse, turned away. I knew that you were

ashamed to know me, and I vowed that you should never feel so again."

"Good God!" exclaimed Guy. "You distort and twist the truth to make it serve your own ends, with the ingenuity of—a woman. I can scarcely stoop to justify myself to you, who do me such cruel wrong. That man was no fit acquaintance for you. It would have been contamination for you to know him. What do you know of such things? No, you shall listen to me," he said, snatching Kitty's hand to detain her—for the desire to break away and burst forth into bitter crying, was strong upon her. All the fierceness of her anger had ebbed away with her passionate words, and her chest was heaving with heavy, suppressed sobs. "For your own sake I will not let you go until you have heard the truth. Heaven knows what mischief all this may lead you to—mischief to yourself and Bertie. You have said many bitter words in your anger, but even you cannot think them true. You say I shrank from speaking to your father, but you must know that I could not be guilty of such a meanness, and that I was only sorry, terribly sorry, for your sake, to see the change in him. It *is* dreadful

that you, a pure-minded innocent child, should be condemned to such association; but is it possible that any man with a grain of manliness in his nature should visit his sins on your head?" There was a moment's pause and then Guy spoke again. "Kitty," he said, still holding her hand, and unconsciously drawing her nearer to himself, "don't you think that if I loved a little girl like you, I should hold her love as the best and dearest gift in the world; that I should be proud of her above everything else in the world, and feel that it was she in her goodness and purity who stooped to me—not I to her?"

"No; I do not think it—I do not believe it. You are the very last person I should credit with such a feeling!" cried Kitty, snatching away her hand—forgetting in her anger that she was referring to that which she most wished to ignore, and bringing back to Guy's remembrance that which she most hoped he would forget. But seeing in the sudden flush which rose to his face that he had understood the reference to the past which her words implied, she turned away, her face crimson with shame, and left him without a word of farewell.



For a few moments Guy Lawrence stood motionless by the stile, too intensely wounded by her words to be capable of action.

Was it possible that she really believed he had not asked her for his wife because she was not good enough for him? The mere thought stung him to madness. He could not listen to such an accusation and keep silence. He turned after her and overtook her with a few hasty strides, forgetting all his resolves, all thought of his brother, only determined to speak out and tell her the truth.

"Stop, Kitty," he said, laying hold of her jacket to detain her, "You shall hear me. It was because Bertie——"

She turned on him a face white with passion.

"Pray don't excuse yourself at Bertie's expense. He is only too good and generous; while you—you—Let me go," and she broke away from him and fled ignominiously from the field of combat, while Guy, dropping his hand, stood passive and mute, stung to the quick by the bitter injustice of her words.

He mechanically watched her receding

form, and his face grew stern with a bitterness he could not repress.



Passion, scorn of the accusation she had thrown upon him, pity for her, horror at the remembrance of how nearly he had in his anger broken the silence he had enforced upon himself, chased each other through his mind in wild confusion. But little by little the bent brow relaxed, the hard lines faded out of his face, and nothing but pity—infinite pity for the girl who had wounded him so cruelly—remained, as with one last look into the distance he turned away with a broken sigh.

* * * * *

And Kitty hurried on; never heeding where she went.

The passion and misery so long pent up, had at last found vent. The thoughts so long brooded over, till injuries and slights, imagined or real, had grown to a thousand times their original magnitude, had at last been given utterance. The bitterness, so long buried in her heart, had broken loose and come to the surface at last.

She had succeeded beyond her desire in wounding the man she loved.



Kitty's passion had not subsided yet, and she felt glad, she could almost have laughed to think how her words had galled Guy Lawrence; how each arrow, poison-tipped with cruelty, had gone home and stung him to the quick.

But the reaction was to come—misery and shame at the remembrance of her own wild words.

She would rather have cut out her tongue than by word or sign have made any reference to that time which she hoped and prayed might be forgotten, for ever buried in oblivion; that time when she had not only been scorned and lightly treated, but when she had, in her utter incredulity of what was too terribly true, acknowledged her own love; and yet now, in the heat of her passion, she had brought it back to Guy's memory. Poor miserable little Kitty! As her wrath slowly ebbed away, she felt as if she could sob her heart out with remorse at the thought of all she had said in her sudden fury. She could scarcely remember it all, but she knew that she had taunted and sneered at Guy, and accused him of meanness; she knew that his face had paled at her words; that at first he had

looked grieved and sorry—sorry for her because she was so passionate and wicked—but afterwards his face had grown hard and angry. She had made him angry. And—and all the time she had loved him so. She had so longed to confess all to him—all her sorrow, all her misery. She would have liked to have sobbed out all her troubles in his arms, and then to have died. She would like to die now; she felt as if her heart was breaking; there was no one to love her. If she might only ask him to forgive her, and then die! Kitty paused, fairly exhausted, for she had been running as if afraid of pursuit, and leaning against a tree, hugged the rough brown trunk with her white arms and rested her little tear-stained face upon it, sobbing like a child after its brief tempest of fury had passed.

She was but a child still, for she could cry and weep her troubles away. She had not learnt yet that “the eyes which cannot weep, are the saddest eyes of all;” that tears which flow quickly wash away half the bitterness of sorrow.

Then Kitty sat down on the soft moss, and unmindful of rheumatism and distorted

limbs, leant her head against the friendly old tree, still

"A sighing and a sobbing."

But the sobs grew gradually quieter, and at last ceased altogether.

She had "cried herself out" as the old nurses say, and a sort of lull succeeded. She found herself watching the flickering leaves in a weary, dejected way, scarcely thinking or feeling anything at all, till everything became dreamy and unreal. The songs of the birds grew fainter and fainter, the branches of the trees grew dimmer and dimmer, the swollen lids drooped over the aching eyes, and Kitty Lorton fell asleep.

She looked as she lay there with her little tear-blistered face, her gentle breathing now and then broken by the faint echo of a sob, like a naughty child, who, worn out by its own passion, has cried itself to sleep.

When she woke, the fleeting brightness of the April day had departed, the sun had disappeared behind some heavy clouds, the fresh air had grown chilly and made her shiver. She raised herself, and tried to open her eyes that were sore and heavy with crying. All her limbs were stiff and aching

with lying on the damp moss, and she was oppressed with a confused sense of misery and desolation.

She would scarcely have been known for the pretty bright Kitty Lorton of past days. She was not cut out for a heroine, for crying did not improve her appearance. She could not cry and look pretty at the same time. The angry flush that had burnt on her cheeks had left her pale and tear-blistered ; her eyes were swollen and red, and had heavy lines traced underneath them ; her hair was tumbled, and her dress disordered. Altogether, she looked a very forlorn little damsel as she picked herself up, and wrapping her jacket tighter round her shivering shoulders, set forth on her dreary walk homewards.

It *was* a dreary walk, and when Kitty reached her uncomfortable home she thought how pleasant it would be if there were some one to welcome her there—a kind mother or gentle sister to greet her with loving smiles and cheering words—on whose tender bosom she might rest her weary head, in whose sympathizing ear she might pour out all her troubles.

A very different welcome than this which

she was picturing to herself did poor Kitty receive, as with slow footsteps she entered the little porch.

Captain Lorton stood there in his usual state of semi-intoxication, with a letter in his hand.

"Where the devil have you been hiding yourself?" was his affectionate greeting. "Is this the sort of little game you play every day when I am absent on business? Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me where you have been?"

"I've been for a walk," faltered Kitty, weary and faint from hunger.

"Been for a walk, have you?" sneered the Captain; "pretty joke when a young lady leaves her home at ten in the morning and returns at six in the evening, giving no better account of herself than that! I'll not stand any of these pranks being played in my house, Miss—it isn't respectable."

Kitty brushed past with something of a smile curling her lip; but he stopped her.

"I'll have none of your fine-lady airs here, madam," he said, with an oath; "you listen to me. You've grown deuced cool about that young lover of yours, lately; but don't you think to play fast and loose with

him, or you'll get the worst of it. Here's a man from Erlesmere with a letter—wants an answer, and you mind what I say."

Kitty took the letter, and read it hastily. "Where's the servant? Let him tell Mr. Deverell I will come to-morrow," she said, quietly.

"Any other orders, madam?" mocked the Captain; "I suppose your ladyship couldn't take the trouble to write an answer?"

"No, I am too tired—that message will do," Kitty answered, abruptly, hastening up the stairs, longing only for the shelter of her own room, feeling that she had this fear also to add to her many difficulties—the almost sickening dread of her father's rage when he should hear that she had broken her engagement with Bertie Deverell.

CHAPTER XII.

BERTIE DEVERELL had been seriously ill. The excitement of the race and his anxiety on his brother's account had increased an illness, the seeds of which had been sown by his reckless life and dissipated habits.

The morning after Rattlesnake's triumph he was in a high fever, raving of horses and ruin, playing imaginary games of écarté, and talking all manner of incoherent nonsense.

For several days Guy Lawrence, who had made very light of his own accident, watched by his bedside anxiously, and when he was well enough to be moved had brought him to Erlesmere.


According to the old proverb—

“When the devil was sick, the devil a saint would be;
When the devil was well, the devil a saint was he.”

Bertie was wonderfully quiet and subdued in manner when he first returned to consciousness. He was never happy except when Guy was near him, and seemed to cling to him with an affection he was very far from showing in the days of his health and strength.

It would have been strange indeed if he had not felt some sort of gratitude to his brother.

Never once since the day of the race, when through the skill and pluck of his rider Rattlesnake had won, and Bertie been saved from ruin, had Guy blamed him for his imprudence and folly, or preached on the uncertainty of things in general and steeplechases in particular. Never once had he drawn a moral from the tale, or done anything but depreciate the part he had himself played in the performance. Though Bertie was too selfish to thoroughly appreciate the generosity of others, he could not be blind to all Guy had done for him. But convalescence is trying to the most patient of us, and he who was a short time ago so full of health and strength, found it almost unbearable to be obliged to lie stretched on a sofa, feeling too weak to



move, with no possible amusement to while away the weary hours.

He grew impatient and irritable, and many a time tried Guy's longsuffering almost beyond endurance.

At College—what with riding and boating, billiards and card-playing, smoking and drinking, with occasional visits to chapel and lecture when they had been absolutely unavoidable—Bertie had managed to pass away the days quickly enough, and he had not thought much about Kitty, or been overwhelmed with grief at the separation from her. But now when he had nothing to do or to think about, it occurred to him that it would be very pleasant to have her to amuse him ; he began to remember how much he had been in love with her, and to feel rather piqued at her want of attention.

"Hang it," he said one day to Guy, "I think she might have come over to see me, or at least to inquire after me, when she knew I was so ill, instead of sending that confounded old duffer."

He did not know that the "confounded old duffer," *i.e.*, Captain Lorton, had come on his own account, not from any solicitude on Kitty's part ; that she, absorbed in her

perplexities, had thought very little about her lover's illness, and was only dreading the day when she would be obliged to see him.

But now Bertie lay among the velvet cushions of his luxurious couch in the little morning room of Erlesmere, expecting Kitty's arrival—for in answer to his note she had sent word that she would come to-morrow.

To-morrow had turned into to-day, and the morning was passing, but she had not come.

Bertie turned impatiently from side to side and cursed the luck which kept him there a prisoner, robbed of health and strength, and made him unable to seek her himself.

The room was the picture of ease and elegance; the sun gleamed on richly-tinted blue satin curtains, on delicate walls painted in artistic frescoes, on tempting soft-pillowed lounges, and tables strewn with every inducement to laziness, in the shape of poetry-books, new novels, and periodicals.

One side of the room opened into a conservatory, and a little sparkling fountain bubbled and sang in the midst of the gaily-

coloured exotics whose delicate perfume scented the warm air.

Bertie himself, in a loose black velvet coat and a violet scarf, his face refined by recent illness, looked like the central point of a brilliantly coloured picture.

Guy used to chaff him about "getting himself up for effect" in his convalescence, and certainly the black velvet made a good contrast to his golden hair and pale face. So Kitty thought as, coming gently through the half-opened door, she stood and looked at him a moment as he lay there with his eyes half-closed. Then she moved forward, and Bertie hearing the sweep of her soft dress over the carpet, half sprang up and held out his hands.

"My darling," he said, drawing her to him and kissing her, "why have you not come before?"

Kitty drew back her face, but left her hands in his.

She had never in her life looked lovelier than she did that morning, as she stood and looked down on her young lover with eyes full of tender compassion. It is impossible to paint in words a face like

Kitty's, so that you can see it as it really was.

"If one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pale gold,

the delicate oval face, the cheeks flushed by the April wind, the parted dewy lips, the glory of her sunny hair and great soft eyes—all might be there; but the face that looked at you from the canvas would be a still one, and so unlike the living, breathing loveliness of the girl herself.

It was a face that set the regular rules of beauty at defiance: it was unlike any other, and bewildered you with its constant changefulness. Now smiling and dimpled with rosier blushes than ever Madame Rachel sold; now pale and sad, with heavy, sorrow-laden eyes.

Kitty's heart was full of tenderness for Bertie, who she thought loved her more than did any one else in the world. By reason of the exaggerated, morbid ideas which she had lately taken into her head, of the degradation which attached to her through her father, she immensely overrated the generosity and unselfishness of Bertie's attachment. However much he had groaned over the connexion with Captain Lorton, how-

ever much he had deplored himself on the subject, he had been too true to his class, the race from which he sprung, to let the girl herself know that he thought it any sacrifice to marry her.

“And all the while he must have known it was a sacrifice—he must have loved me so well and so truly to be willing to give up so much for me; and yet he is so generous, he has never by word or sign led me to think he stooped to me,” thought Kitty, feeling full of tender gratitude to the man who had been so good to her—not knowing that any sacrifice which Bertie had made had been only made to his own selfishness, as a spoilt child will obtain a toy at any cost rather than deny himself the gratification of its possession.

She did not know how often Bertie had lamented over the connexion with the house of Lorton which was inevitable if he would not give her up. She did not know that when he was at College, surrounded by friends and admirers, and (being through Guy’s generosity always flush of money) a swell in a small way, he had sometimes repented of the rashness which had made him think of marrying young, and groaned

to think how they would all laugh at the idea of his turning Benedict at twenty-one, "just when most fellows are beginning to see a little of life," thought Bertie, disconsolately.

But illness and solitude had somewhat changed his ideas, and marriage and consequent companionship with a pretty girl did not seem such a bad thing after all. "And Kitty isn't the sort of girl to expect one to be always tied to her apron-strings. I can throw the old duffer overboard very soon, and it will be always pleasant to have a nice home and a pretty girl to come to when I am tired of kicking about," said Bertie to himself, chewing the cud of his matrimonial reflections, and gazing with half-closed eyes at the angels and cupids disporting themselves in a state of nudity on the azure-painted ceiling. And then Kitty came in—Kitty with her cheeks fresh tinted by the wind, and eyes full of loving tenderness; and the sight of her added warmth to his not very glowing feelings, and made him forget that he had ever cooled down in his ardent anticipations of married felicity; made him forget everything, but that she was very pretty, and he was in love with her.

"Poor Bertie!" said Kitty, gently caressing his hand with hers and speaking softly; "you have been very ill."

"Yes, and Kitty never cared enough about me to come near me, or even to come and ask how I was. Cruel little Kitty," said Bertie, trying to draw her face down to his. But Kitty gently pushed back his hand: she could not forget what she had come there to say, and that he had no right to kiss her any more; but it was so hard—so hard to tell him, and he was so unconscious of the fate that was in store for him—so loving and happy. How could she ever begin?

"And what have you been doing all this time, my darling?" said Bertie, looking at her fondly, quite ignorant that anything was wrong, and much too self-confident even to doubt her love for himself. He scarcely heeded that she drew back from his caresses, for he knew that she had never been fond of demonstrations, had never indulged in them but once. "You look well enough; your bright face is a sight indeed for eyes sad and weary with long solitude."

Kitty laughed. "Poor Bertie! you're not used to it as I am."

"And then it was hard on me to knock up just at that time," went on Bertie, glad to find an ear in which to pour out his grievances. "You don't know how I had looked forward to riding that steeplechase. None of the other fellows could have done it, and I had staked everything on it. It was hard lines."

"Yes it was," said Kitty, soothingly; "but it didn't matter as it turned out, did it?"

"It was wonderful luck, Guy's showing up just in the nick of time, and he was a brick; but all the same, Kitty, I wished I was in his place," said Bertie, with unconscious selfishness. "And you were there too, and I scarcely saw you. How did you get on?"

"Not very well, Bertie," answered the girl, her thoughts wandering, her face growing sadder and paler now the transient flush was fading out of it.

She was wondering how she should begin her hard task, how she should introduce the subject on which she knew she must speak to him, wishing that he would say something that would lead to it. Bertie went on talking, she went on listening, or seeming to

listen, but still they in no way approached that topic which was so important to them both, of which it was making Kitty's heart cold to think.

At last Bertie began speaking of the future, her heart bounded with a sudden throb, and then stood still—now was her time, she must speak now, or for ever after hold her peace.

"It will not be long to wait now, dearest," he was saying, still holding her hand and looking tenderly into her eyes; "one short year and then I shall be able to marry you, and take you away from your dull home, and we shall be so happy, Kitty."

"Bertie, you must listen," said Kitty with a sort of gasp. "I—I must tell you something."

"What is it, darling?" he answered, putting his arm round her and drawing her gently towards him. "I will listen for ever, if it is to tell me that you love me—you so seldom tell me that, Kitty."

"No, no—it isn't that," she cried, pushing her hands away. "I shall never tell you that again—I shall never marry you."

And then, having made her sudden plunge, she paused breathless, and looked at him.

Bertie raised himself from his easy attitude and gazed back at her in sheer astonishment.

"What do you mean, Kitty—what is the matter?" he said at last. "Have I said anything to vex you?"

"No, Bertie—never, never; you have been too good to me always. For that very reason if for no other I would not marry you. Do you think I will let you give up so much and do yourself this wrong, just because you are more generous and kind than all the rest of the world put together?"

"Kitty," said Bertie, pushing back his hair and staring at her in bewilderment. "Am I mad, or are you? What is the meaning of all this?"

"No wonder you cannot understand me," she answered, calming herself with an effort. "I have been speaking wildly, but I will try and explain. It is such a hard, cruel thing to have to say to you, and you do not know how sorely it pains me to be obliged to say it; but no fine words will soften it, Bertie. I cannot marry you—hush, please—please listen to me. It is not for my own sake I speak—it is for yours." She paused, and then went on very quietly

"The world has taught me many hard truths lately: it has taught me that you and I are not equally matched, that you who are rich and honourable stoop and lose caste in marrying the daughter of a man fallen so low, so disgraced, as my father is. You, in your generosity, would not have let me know this, but I have found it out for myself, and I am too proud to marry you."

"Kitty, Kitty, who has put these ridiculous ideas in your head?" cried Bertie, using in his anger almost the same words as his brother had done the preceding day. "My poor little darling, you must forget all this nonsense."

He stood up, though he was weak and tottering, and would have drawn her to him, but she pushed him gently back on the sofa and sat down beside him.

"Bertie, believe me, I am not speaking in excitement or without proper thought. It must be all over between us. We shall be good friends always, I hope, though there must be no more thought of marriage. Believe me, dear Bertie, you will live to thank me for saying this, though it seems unkind and cruel now. You might be

happy enough at first, but when the novelty had worn off, you would be ashamed of my father, perhaps ashamed of me, and wish you had never married me. Do you think I could bear that, Bertie?"

Kitty spoke earnestly, and in her eagerness unconsciously laid her hand on his arm.

Bertie almost shook it off.

"Do you think me a brute?" he said, angrily. "If these are your ideas, it's a pity you did not think of them before you promised to marry me. May I ask what is the cause of all this?"

Kitty looked at him, the tears gathering in her eyes.

If he had known what pain it was to her whose heart was yearning for love, to destroy, and with her own hand thrust away the love which he offered her, he would scarcely have spoken so harshly.

"There is no other cause but that I have told you," she faltered; "and it is true—you cannot deny it, Bertie—that you would give up much in marrying me—and I cannot let you do it."

Bertie's anger was passing.

"You little goose," he said, looking re-

proachfully at her ; “and so because somebody has put some high-flown, new-fangled rubbish into your silly little head, you came here in real, sober earnest to break off your engagement with me? Why, Kitty, I’ll bring an action for ‘breach of promise’ against you. My darling, don’t you know how proud I shall be of my little wife, the prettiest girl in all the county? Don’t let us have any more nonsense—you nearly made me really, seriously angry.”

“It is not nonsense; I wish it were, Bertie,” said Kitty, speaking calmly, in very despair. “I mean it all; you must try and forgive me; and, oh! don’t be angry with me — you are the only friend I have.”

“You mean it!” said Bertie, fiercely; “you deliberately and intentionally throw me over, and you come here in cold blood to tell me, without any regard to what my wishes and feelings on the subject may be?”

He spoke savagely, for the spirit of contradiction which is so strong in most men, made Kitty Lorton appear all the more precious in his eyes now that he was in danger of losing her. Moreover his vanity was likely to receive a terrible blow. It

was almost impossible for him to believe that any girl, least of all this one, who had pretended to love him, should be willing to give him up like this.

"And you have trumped up this paltry reason as an excuse," Bertie went on, finding Kitty did not speak. "It would have been better to tell the truth and say you did not love me."

His words hit her hard—harder than he thought; but still she spoke the truth when she answered him.

"It was not because I did not love you I made up my mind to say this to you. And this is no excuse; it is only too true that I am not your equal—that you could not marry me without feeling ashamed of me and of my poor father. My eyes were blinded to this fact for a long, long time, Bertie, and you were too generous to open them; but when they were opened, then I knew that you and I must never be more to each other than we are now."

She paused, but Bertie had buried his face in the cushions in sullen silence.

"For pity's sake don't make my task harder than it is; don't part from me in

anger. I—I am so lonely and miserable, Bertie.”

He lifted his head.

“I wish to Heaven I could understand you, Kitty: one minute you drive me from you, the next you complain of being lonely and miserable. Is my love nothing to you that you can give it up so easily?”

Kitty only bent her head, so that her face was almost hidden; but she did not answer.

“Kitty, some one who wishes to separate us has made you take up this idea; but you should have been wiser than to believe all this rubbish. It’s a lie—a confounded, trumped-up lie—and I shall never be ashamed of you, I will never give you up.”

“And you will never be ashamed of my father—never think that you have married beneath you?” asked the girl, fixing her great soft eyes on his face.

Bertie crimsoned.

“Good Heavens! Kitty, why need you put me through this sort of inquisition? I marry you—not your father. What does it matter to me about all the rest, so long as I have you?” Bertie spoke tenderly, and put

his arm round her, but she gently drew herself away.

"You have said enough, Bertie," she said, quietly. "If you were a different sort of man, and cared nothing for the world, and only for me, I might let you make this sacrifice; but knowing that you would repent of it, I will not."

The words were simple enough, but she spoke them with a quiet dignity which became her well.

"Good-bye, Bertie: wont you say good-bye?"

Bertie looked at the little pleading face that was close to his own. For a moment he kept silence, the next he drew her suddenly down to himself, and, holding her prisoner, kissed her passionately.

"I will never let you go. You are mine; I will not release you—I will keep you to your promise, even against your will. Consider yourself free, if you like, but when I am of age I will come and claim you for my wife, and you *shall* marry me."

Kitty freed herself from his grasp, and stood before him with a crimson face.

"You make me regret less that I have pained you. You have no right to treat

me like this." And she turned to go.

"Stay, I will not let you go until you promise me that you will be my wife."

"I will not promise," answered Kitty, roused to defiance.

Bertie threw himself back on the cushions, half in anger, half in exhaustion, and his face that had been so flushed became white as death. Kitty's heart smote her that she had not remembered his recent illness, and had tried his strength too far; and she bent over him, speaking more softly—

"Bertie, one day you will be glad that I have done this; but I have seemed unkind now, and I had forgotten that you were not strong. Oh, Bertie, please look up and tell me you forgive me before I go."

"My forgiveness can matter little to you who have so soon tired of me," he muttered, sullenly. "I should have thought it more straightforward if you had told the plain truth—said you were sick of me, or had some better *parti* in view, whichever it might be—than have tried to humbug me with this nonsense."

"You are unjust," cried Kitty, with something like a sob rising in her throat, "cruelly

unjust." And then she turned to go without another word.

"You are going now, I suppose?" said Bertie, raising himself, scarcely knowing what he said in his anger, "to blazon forth to all the world that you have jilted me, and I am to play the character of the forsaken. I am to——"

"Hush!" said the girl; "don't say what you'll be sorry for afterwards. There is no need to tell any one unless you wish it. It can't do me much harm to keep silence."

She was glad of the respite, glad not to be obliged to tell her father just yet, and that which would have deterred most girls from making such a promise had no power to influence her. What mattered it to her if all other men thought her engaged to Bertie Deverell? there were none likely to woo her, or for whose wooing she would care.

"Kitty, you have been cruel and heartless, but I have loved you, and I cannot give you up like this," pleaded Bertie, his anger again melting into tenderness. "Wait till I'm of age—only one year and a few months—it isn't long, but it is long enough to prove my faithfulness to you."

If then I am the same, will you not believe that my love is above all other considerations? Say that you will wait for me, that you will not marry any one else, and that if I come to you then, you will not be so hard."

"There is no chance of my marrying, but I will not promise anything—for your sake. And you will not come, Bertie," she said, with a sad smile, and a look that seemed like prevision in her beautiful eyes. But Bertie, pouring out a string of prophecies, promises, and anticipations of the bright future that was to be theirs, scarcely heeded her.

Kitty rose to go; she took his hand in hers. "Good-bye," she said, ignoring his last words; "I shall not see you again—our ways lie far apart."

Bertie seized her hand and covered it with kisses, but she tore herself from him and was gone before he could reply to her or call her back; and as the door closed sharply, and shut her out from his sight, his eyes fell on a little packet that lay at his feet.

It was his own letters—a few scrawly, boyish-looking epistles, sent chiefly from Oxford, and the little gipsy-ring, studded with diamonds and turquoises, that he had

given her. He threw them from him with an oath, and started up to follow her; but he had forgotten his weakness: his strength failed him, and he fell heavily back, cursing his luck and Kitty Lorton by turns.

When Guy came in he found Bertie in a savage temper, and he obtained no replies to the few questions he could not refrain from asking about his brother's interview with Kitty Lorton.

Baffled in his love, wounded in his vanity, Bertie Deverell vowed in his passion that he would never again see or speak of the girl who had injured him. Least of all would he acknowledge to his brother that she had thrown him over.

So it was that Guy Lawrence went abroad again, unaware that the engagement between them was broken.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was the height of the London season—rather more than a year after Kitty Lorton had taken her farewell of Bertie Deverell. The month of June was drawing to a close, and daily the drive seemed more densely thronged with carriages; daily the brilliant crowd of pedestrians that fluttered and buzzed about the chief rendezvous of Vanity Fair, grew thicker. Everybody was in town—from the *crème de la crème* of Belgravia and Mayfair, to the chalk-and-water of Brompton and St. John's Wood. It was impossible to count the number of dilettante languid men who sauntered along Dundreary Row of a morning, or hung over the rails by the corner in the afternoon—

“Their name was legion, and their bearing brave.”

People said there never had been such a gay season. When the hot June sun had

sunk behind the clouds, and the soft mellow twilight, that was not darkness, had fallen over the squares and streets, the carriages, with their spanking horses and their gay liveries, used to roll along the dusty streets in countless numbers, bearing dainty white-robed ladies to opera or ball.

One little solitary girl sat perched in an upper window of one of the large houses in Grosvenor Square, and watched them whirling past, and wondered where they were going, and whether their occupants were just as happy and as gay as they looked.

She was a little country-bred girl. She had never been in London before, and now all the noise and bustle and confusion seemed to bewilder her. She was in the centre of the gay world, but she was as much apart from it as if she had been still buried in the depths of the country.

Sitting there by herself, when the duties of the day were over and she was alone, she used to speculate about the lives of these fashionable ladies, who seemed to live only to amuse themselves. She used to wonder if she would be very happy if she were one of them, and sometimes she used

to feel that it was very hard, very sad, that she should be shut out from all these things that made the world so pleasant and life so worth the living, and wonder what she had done that her fate should be so much harder than the fate of others. Poor little Kitty! Her heart was very sore in these days, and she forgot to feel grateful for all the good that she had, in her regrets and longings over that which she had not.

Six months ago Captain Lorton had died, not the death of the righteous, but the only death that was to be expected for him. An attack of delirium tremens, sharper than any previous one, had carried him to his grave, unregretted, unlamented, unwept, save by his poor little daughter.

But Kitty, forgetting all his sins, remembering only his death, and all the horror of it, wept very long and very bitterly when he was taken from her for ever, and she was left alone in the world.

His protection, maybe, had been worse than none, but death wipes out old scores, blots out past sins, and she forgot all that had gone before, remembered only that he was her father, and was dead. And oh! the

horror of a death like his: the shrieks and cries of terror at the things which exist not save in the fevered imagination, the curses and blasphemies coming from lips so soon to be closed in death, the delirious ravings of crimes committed long ago in the irrevocable past, the calls for help which cannot be given, the despairing struggle against that which is inevitable!

In vain Kitty hid herself in the farthest corner of the house, in vain she shut her ears to keep out the terrible sounds. In the dead of the night they would come to her, and she would lie trembling in unutterable horror and praying for the light. And then when death came, and he lay there stiff and cold, when the form that had been so debased by long indulgence of sin was wrapped in the terrible grandeur of an awful stillness; when the hush there falls on us all at the presence of an unfathomable mystery had fallen on the house whose walls had so lately resounded with fearful cries, then Kitty's terrors only increased. She, who had called herself brave, shrank in sickening fear from the inanimate thing that had once been her father. She had no friend to reason her out of the morbid

terrors which had come upon her with too much loneliness ; and they stole the health and strength from her, the bloom from her cheeks, and the lustre from her eyes.

The pale, sad-eyed, black-robed girl who came to London to look for a situation as a governess was a very different Kitty Lorton from the bright, blooming little coquette who had ridden by Guy Lawrence's side under the trees one summer morning.

When Captain Lorton's affairs came to be looked into, it was found that Kitty would be very nearly destitute.

She was wondering where she should go, and what she would do, almost wishing that the churchyard which sheltered her father would shelter her too, from a world in which she had no home, no resting-place, when there came to her a letter from a niece of Lady Caroline Deverell's, who had been a constant visitor at Erlesmere in the lifetime of its mistress.

She was married, rich, prosperous, and charitable ; she remembered the little girl who had been a *protégée* and favourite of her aunt Caroline's, and hearing of Captain Lorton's death, wrote to poor little Kitty a kind, generous letter, offering her a shelter

in her house until she should find some situation that would suit her, and begging her to come at once, as it was not right that she should stay, lonely and unprotected. Moreover, Captain Lorton's house was soon to be given up to the creditors, and even that shelter would be denied to the fatherless girl.

Poor Kitty! she was sorely afraid of going among strangers, but she had no choice. She would soon have nowhere to lay her head; she was forced to accept the charity that was offered to her in her time of need.

Mrs. Hoare was handsome, gay, and in universal charity with herself and all the world.

She was the very model of a fair, fashionable English matron, but all her heart was not yet swallowed up in the abyss of fashion. The natural generosity of her nature asserted itself, and she gave plentifully out of her abundance to those that lacked.


She took a fancy to the poor lonely girl who came to her in her destitution, and would not let her go away among strangers. Perhaps she saw how unfitted she was, with her morbid sensitiveness, to encounter the world, to bear the slights and the trials to

which she would be subjected in her new character of governess.

Moreover, though Kitty had, through Lady Caroline's kindness, received a good education, her acquirements fell far short of those exacted of a governess, in the present day of certificates and college examinations; for in her hours of pleasant idling, more than half of that which she had learnt had gone out of her lazy little head. So Mrs. Hoare would not let Kitty leave her, but kept her as a sort of governess and playmate for her own little fair-haired children, who were really too young to be beyond the teaching of a nursery governess; but she, in her kindness, could not bear the idea of the pretty, sad-faced girl going out into the world all alone, and so made an excuse to keep her in her own house.

"It was really much better," as she explained to her husband, "that the children should have a nice lady-like companion to go out with them, play with them, and teach them all that was necessary, than that they should be left entirely to the charge of nurses."

And so Kitty stayed, and her place was not a very hard one, and her mistress



(though she saw but little of her, on account of her numerous dissipations) was a very kind one.

If she had known all that she might have had to bear, all that other women bred and nurtured quite as delicately as she had been have to endure every day of their lives, she might have been more grateful for the comparative happiness which had fallen to her lot.

Mrs. Hoare did her best to make Kitty happy. She would sometimes take her out for a drive in her carriage, or to any amusements or entertainments at which she thought she would not be exposed to any slights; but Kitty in her over-sensitiveness shrank from mixing in a world in which she had no part or lot, and was never more lonely or miserable than when in the midst of a gay crowd of happy people, and yet not one of them; and so she always begged to be left alone, and her happiest time was when the children were in bed, and she could sit in the gloaming and dream and think all by herself.

To-night was one of Mrs. Hoare's receptions. Her house was one of the most popular in London, and she herself, still

young and fair, richly-dowered and amiable, was a very queen in her own little world.

Kitty's room—the schoolroom it was called—was high up in the front of the house, and from the window she could see the people arrive. She liked to watch the carriages with their bright lamps draw up before the house, to see the doors thrown open, the steps let down, and the ladies in their rich satins and velvets, their airy tulle and muslins, sweep over the carpet into the house. They would soon come now, and then the music would begin. Sometimes there were celebrated artistes who sang and played, and then Kitty would creep down the stairs and listen breathlessly, and she could even hear scraps of the conversation, whispered flirtations and compliments. Ah! once she was a chief actress in these sort of scenes—now she was only a spectator at a very great distance.

Kitty's reflections were interrupted by a tap at the door, there was a rustling of silken sheen, and Mrs. Hoare came softly into the darkened room.

"May I come in, Miss Lorton? You are all in the dark—how dull for you! My dear, I came to ask you if you wouldn't


change your mind and come down for a little while ; there'll be time to dress even now if you will."

"No, thank you ; you are very kind, but indeed I'd rather not," said Kitty, springing from the window-sill, half ashamed at being caught moping in the dark. Then, just distinguishing with eyes that had grown used to the dim light, the fair woman in her silks and laces, "How beautiful you look !" she exclaimed.

"Do I?" with a gratified smile ; "you little flatterer, you can't see me. But wont you come? we want some music to-night, and you can sing us one of your pretty songs ; and Mrs. Pearson—you know the old lady who took such a fancy to you—and the girls will be here, so you wont be lonely."

The "girls" were Mrs. Hoare's sisters, all golden-haired and amiable like herself, and always ready to do their best to make the poor little governess feel at home.

"They are always kind, and you too," faltered Kitty ; "but indeed I am out of place among them all. I am better here—and happier. I like to watch the people



come," she added, with an attempt at a smile.

"Hark! there is a carriage—I must go. Well, I'm very sorry you wont come. Good night, Miss Lorton. Ring for lights or go to bed; don't sit in the dark—it makes you dull." And the fair hostess swept away to receive her guests, and soon forgot all about the little lonely girl upstairs.

But Kitty stayed on at the window till it had grown quite late, watching the people come and go. She was glad she had not gone downstairs, to be stared at and commented on, to hear people ask who she was, and fancy the whispered answer, "only the governess." All Mrs. Hoare's kindness could not shield her from this sort of thing, and though half of it was imaginary, yet Kitty in her plain black dress looked very different from the gay butterflies in their gauzy robes, very far apart from them, and was better in her solitude than in their midst.

Carriage after carriage had deposited its gay occupants at Mrs. Hoare's door. Hansom cabs, broughams and private cabs, with high steppers and well-got-up grooms, had brought dozens of men who all looked very

much alike in their loose overcoats and light gloves. Some of the people were already going, for Mrs. Hoare's assemblies were very free-and-easy affairs, with a little dancing, a little music, a little of everything, and people were free to come and go when they pleased. Kitty was getting sleepy, so she prepared to descend from the perch and go to bed—to dream perhaps of gay balls and whirling dances, in which she was the Cinderella, the admired and envied of all beholders. Another Hansom cab; another man cut out on the model of all the rest, loose-coated, grey-gloved. Ah! this one had a beard that looked dark in the uncertain light, and very broad shoulders. How like he was to Guy Lawrence! There flashed through Kitty's mind the remembrance of a day when she had looked out of her window down on him, just as she looked down on this other man now.

Then, she was in the country, and the air was sweet-scented with many flowers, and her heart was high-bounding with many hopes. Now, she was here, where the air was smoke-tainted and stifling, and her heart was heavy-laden with many sorrows. After all, men were all very much alike;

Guy Lawrence was abroad. Kitty had heard Mrs. Hoare lamenting only yesterday about her favourite "cousin Guy," and wondering when he would return ; and yet here was a man just like him, a fashionable evening-party-going man, who had come to flirt and dance with the girls downstairs.

Kitty heaved a sigh, sprang from the window-sill, and very soon lost the thread of her remembrances and musings in the sweet forgetfulness of a dreamless sleep.

Downstairs, amid the bright lights, the gay music, the hum of many voices and soft laughter, the hours sped merrily enough. The girls in their light floating dresses, the matrons in their rich-coloured silks, satins, and velvets, and their glittering diamonds, looked like the brilliant pictures of a kaleidoscope, ever shifting, ever changing. Fair girls, with snowy shoulders,

"Smiles in their eyes, and simpers on their lips,"

were flirting their fans, coquetting, dancing ; matronly dowagers were discussing their own and their neighbours' daughters, were shaking their heads over the last delicate morsel of scandal ; men were lounging in groups in the doorways and corners of the

room, looking as if the conjugation of the verb *s'amuser* was an intensely fatiguing affair. And a new-comer was pushing his way through the room in search of the hostess: a man with a brown face, a short curly beard, and very broad, strong-looking shoulders. There was something different about his appearance to that of most of the other men in the room, who were many of them pale-faced and effeminated by the dilettante fashionable life it was their wont to lead. People turned to look at him, and wonder vaguely who he was, but when he found the hostess, and pushed his way through the little coterie of admirers by which she was always surrounded, she knew him at once, in spite of his bronzed face.

"Guy," she said, coming eagerly forward, "is it really you, or your ghost?"

"My ghost, I suppose, Clara," answered Guy, shaking her warmly by the hand, "as I've been buried alive for a year or more. It's just the hour for *revenants*, so I won't apologize for turning up so late, and without an invitation."

"Denizens of the other world always come unasked," laughed Mrs. Hoare.

"And when they're not wanted," re-

torted Guy ; "but it will be daylight soon, and then of course I shall disappear *en règle*, with a rattle of chains and a smell of sulphur."

"Then I'll make the most of you while I've got you," answered his cousin, and then there followed such a string of questions, "Why hadn't he written to say he was coming back?" "Did he intend to remain, or go away again to that horrid Rome?" "Where was he staying?" "Wouldn't he come and stay in Grosvenor Square?" that Guy Lawrence found it difficult to stem the torrent, or put in a word to explain how he had suddenly taken into his head to return to England, and had arrived as soon as the letter he had written to announce his approach ; and going straight from his hotel to Bertie's rooms, finding him out had examined the score of invitation cards on his table, and found among many others for the same night, Mrs. Hoare's "At Home."

"So of course I pitched on that, jumped into a Hansom, and found myself once more in a gay and festive scene."

"You chose out my card from among all the rest?" said Mrs. Hoare, with a

beaming smile, for Guy was a great pet of hers.

"*Ca va sans dire*," answered he, with a little bow. "But where is Bertie?"

"He was here; perhaps he is in the dancing-room—he's always in requisition, and a terrible flirt. I believe he counts his conquests by the dozen, and half the girls in town have fallen in love with his golden curls and blue eyes," laughed Mrs. Hoare.

"I'll go and look for him," said Guy, rising. "*Au revoir, belle cousine*."

And before she could stay him, he was making his way through the still crowded dancing-room.

He pushed against a tall man who was lazily twirling his moustache and whitening his back against the wall, and turned to apologize.

"Hollo! Bentham, is it you?" he exclaimed, suddenly recognising the owner of the long legs which had nearly upset him.

"Yes. I'm sorry to say it is," drawled Bentham, languidly, rubbing the injured member. "Wish it wasn't; wish it was some other fellow's legs you'd smashed. Is that the sort of way they cut about at Rome? If it is, I think, you know, I'd

advise you not to do in England as Rome does."

"I beg your pardon. I was in a hurry," said Guy, with a smile.

"Ah! that's it; we're never in a hurry here, any of us. We've got nothing to do, and plenty of time to do it in."

"I hope I've not done much damage. I didn't see you, 'pon my honour," said Lawrence, his eyes roaming about the room in quest of Bertie.

"No? because I'm so small, I suppose," said Bentham, surveying his six foot three inches in an opposite mirror. "I say, old fellow, I've about had enough of this—I'm off. Come to the Club?"

"I'm looking for Bertie—do you know where he is?"

"Hooked it, hours ago. I shouldn't wonder if you found him knocking about the balls at the Club;" and Bentham pulled himself into an upright position preparatory to departure.

"All right, I'll come," answered Lawrence. "How came you in the dancing-room? You're not much devoted to this kind of thing, are you?"

"I? No. Can't afford it. Wears out

too many boots; uses up too much wind. I was watching that girl yonder. Fair girl—splendid action—best thing out.”

“Going to enter yourself for the Matrimonial Stakes?” laughed Guy.

“Well,” answered Bentham, “it takes a good deal to surprise me, but I should be surprised to find myself at the St. George’s slaughter-house. Bless you, I’m not such a fool as I look.”

Guy laughed. “Have you seen much of Bertie?” he asked presently, as they found themselves obliged to wait for the departure of some other people before they could make their way to their hostess.

“No, very little. He’s going the pace, Lawrence.”

“How do you mean?” asked Guy, his face suddenly serious.

“I’m not in his secrets. I’ve scarcely seen him except at the Club or in the Park. He’s always at the theatre, and I’m not much given to that sort of thing.”

“That’s a new taste,” said Guy. “Bertie never could sit through a piece, unless it was a burlesque or a screaming farce.”

Bentham looked at Guy with his eyebrows elevated to the very roots of his hair

—there was never a very long space between the two.

“You don’t mean to say you’ve not heard of the new actress?” he said, very slowly.

“No,” said Guy, carelessly; “you know I’m quite behind the age.”

Bentham gave a low whistle, and a sort of aside—“Whew, so Master Bertie’s kept it dark!” But it is the nature of asides (off the stage as well as on) to be more audible than the rest of the conversation, so Guy turned with his brow knitted—

“Come, Bentham, what has Bertie kept dark?”

“I say, it isn’t fair, you know. Mustn’t tell tales out of school.”

“But you say you’re not in Bertie’s secrets, so you can only tell what all the rest of the world knows. Surely I’ve a right to hear that?” answered Guy.

“Well, it’s the talk of the town,” began Bentham, twirling his moustaches half uneasily.

“What’s the talk of the town? Why the deuce can’t you answer me?”

“Why, Bertie, you know, and Estelle,

the new actress. They're laying heavy odds he'll marry her."

"Good Heavens! Are you raving? Bertie marry an actress?" exclaimed Guy, his face suddenly white.

"Hush, my dear fellow; they'll think we're lunatics. Here's Mrs. Hoare."

And Guy found himself face to face with his cousin, and though his mind was in a perfect maze of bewilderment, he had to compose himself and shake hands, and talk merry, rattling small talk, with all the self-possession he could summon to his aid. It was marvellous how well he did it.

"Well, if you must go, but it isn't daylight."

"We can't see the daylight till you have closed your eyes," answered Guy. "Good-bye—give my love to the children. Tell them I passed through Paris, and brought them heaps of bonbons." And then they got away. Guy never spoke a word until he and Bentham were seated in the Hansom on their way to the Club.

"Tell me all you know," he said then, very quietly.

"Well, you see, she's an awful stunner—devilish fine woman. Every one raves

about her. They trumped up some story about her being a lady, the daughter of a poor Italian contessa, or some rot—don't believe a word of it. She's no more a lady than I'm—a cad." Bentham stopped to light a cigarette. Guy tried to restrain his impatience.

"And Bertie—how has *his* name got to be coupled with an actress?"

"Why, you see, he's awfully spoony on her; but that's nothing—there isn't a man in town who wouldn't go in for her if she'd have him. Dukes and lords and marquises, diamonds and bouquets and broughams, are all thrown at her feet; but if you'll believe me," said Brentham, dropping his habitual drawl, and giving an energetic puff at his cigarette, "she wont so much as look at 'em; takes their presents, and then laughs in their faces. She's dangerous, 'pon my word—she's awfully dangerous, that woman."

Bentham paused.

"But Bertie," said Guy again.

"Well, I'm coming to that—what a deuced hurry you're in! Estelle deludes all the world, and deludes Master Bertie into the belief that she's in love with him. But you mark my words, Guy—that woman's as

deep as the bottomless pit. I know her little game."

"What the——" began Guy.

"Marriage, my dear fellow : simply that—marriage ; and she knows that Bertie's the only one of all the lot who's fool enough to think the game's worth the candle. There's many of them would bid high, but not so high as that."

"What right—I beg your pardon—what reason have you to suppose that Bertie thinks of marrying this woman?" asked Guy.

"I've little doubt that if she plays her line as well as she's thrown it, she'll hook him," answered Bentham, coolly.

"And why should this—adventuress—Heaven knows I'm tempted to use a stronger word than I ever tacked to a woman's name yet—why should she pitch on Bertie for her victim?"

"Haven't I told you ? Because he's mad about her, makes a perfect fool of himself. He's her slave, her shadow ; and then *sans doute*, she thinks it not a bad spec. He's very flush of money, and passes for no end of a swell about town. He and Leath—you remember Leath ?—have started a drag

between them—a team of roans; rather a weedy lot.”

Guy puffed away at a cigar, but he did not speak. Perhaps he was wondering where he should find the money to pay for all this extravagance—for that it would come out of his pocket sooner or later there could be little doubt.

“And there’s that cad Pearce—Bertie’s awfully thick with him. You know they fell out after the steeplechase; Bertie cut him, but the other got round him somehow, and now they are as thick as brimstone and treacle. Pearce is now giving Bertie a few lessons in billiards and other things, and Bertie thinks he’s a match for him, but he isn’t.”

“I wonder Bertie can tolerate that snob, especially after that affair at Aylesbury,” muttered Guy, with his brows gathered into an ominous frown; “there was a strong taste of brimstone in some of his doings there. Here we are.” Guy sprang out. As he paused a moment on the steps, the early daylight of a June morning shone on his face, and brought out many lines and furrows, and some white hairs in his beard. He looked like a man of forty as he stood

there, ostensibly to take a look down Pall Mall and mark the new features in the old familiar face, but really to throw away all traces of the anxiety which he felt. "You must make allowances, Bentham," he said, taking his companion's arm, and pushing back the wide door of the Junior — ; "I feel I've been awfully surly, but — I couldn't help it."

"All right, Guy," answered Bentham, cordially; "we shall find the youngster here, and I've no doubt you'll pull him through. Got him out of the last scrape, you know, and will out of this."

And then they ascended the staircase and made straight for the billiard-room.

Bertie was not in the larger one, but Bentham led the way to another and less frequented, and looking through the glass in the door, saw him playing a game with Pearce.

"There they are," said Bentham, "the wolf and the lamb. Bertie submits to his fleecing with tolerable complacency. Let's go in and see them play."

Bertie came towards Guy and grasped his hand with a look of genuine pleasure at the surprise; but Guy, watching him, saw that

some after-thought, some remembrance, turned the momentary gratification which Bertie had felt at his sudden return into annoyance, and he inwardly cursed the unknown woman who had power to set his brother against him.

In the absence of all other love, Guy's love for Bertie had come to be the one all-absorbing devotion of his life. No mother could be more unselfishly desirous for his good than Guy had grown to be. He had merged all ambition for himself and his own happiness into ambition for Bertie's success and happiness.

Long ago he had had dreams of his own, of standing for Sloughborough, where he was always safe to secure a seat through family influence, but now he was too indifferent to exert himself to make his life any other than it was. He had thought that whatever local prestige the Squire of Erlesmere might possess should be used on behalf of Bertie when he reached the age necessary to take a seat in Parliament, hoping that such a career might engender aspirations, the pursuit of which would wean him from the dubious style of life he had been living. But now it seemed possible that Bertie's

own folly would put an end to all such ideas.

After greeting Bertie, and bowing with the coldest formality to Pearce, Guy lighted another cigar, and threw himself on a lounge to watch the game.

"Your stroke, Deverell," cried Pearce, looking intensely annoyed at Guy's appearance. As Bertie approached the table, Guy had an opportunity to scan him narrowly. His face looked flushed and anxious, and there was a nervous twitching of his fingers, as he made a "rest," that betokened ill for the coolness of his play.

Pearce, on the other hand, seemed quite calm and self-possessed, handling his cue with the freedom and precision of a skilled player.

The marker had called the score, "forty-two to forty." Bertie had missed a rather easy hazard, leaving a certain "loser" off the red. Pearce made it, scoring the required eight off the break, and winning the game.

"You ought to have won," said he to Bertie. "Awfully hard lines missing that hazard—lost you the game. Have another?"

"Yes, of course," replied Bertie. "That makes thirty—play you double or quits."

"All right. Spot the red, marker."

For the first half of the game the scoring was tolerably even, although any one moderately skilled in billiards could see that the players were not well matched.

Bertie's strokes were more showy than effective, while Pearce never ran an unnecessary risk for the sake of a brilliant coup, but acted on the telling principle of rarely missing an easy one—at least this was evidently his great point, as Guy easily perceived from the accuracy with which he played some of his strokes; but on this particular occasion he not only failed to score when a cannon seemed a certainty, but did the same thing two or three times.

The first miss raised Guy's suspicions that Pearce had made it intentionally, and the subsequent ones confirmed them. Bertie was playing with such rashness and want of skill that, although not scoring himself, he almost invariably left Pearce easy breaks. If his opponent had taken advantage of them, he must have inevitably won with the greatest ease; but this did not appear to be his policy—he evidently

wished to make the chances seem so equal that Bertie would ascribe his defeat to luck rather than inferior play. There was no certain score left, but Bertie, playing hard, fluked a losing hazard. This brought the balls together; a series of easy strokes followed, which Bertie made, and then by a lucky kiss scored an apparently impossible cannon. Stroke succeeded stroke, and fluke succeeded fluke—the balls coming together with a strange persistency of good luck—until the game was called forty-seven to twenty. Bertie had only three to score. The red ball was near the top cushion, so placed that a fine gentle losing hazard would win him the game. Pearce saw that he had fooled his opponent too long, that a critical stroke was about to be played which would probably lose him sixty pounds.

Bertie was in position, when Pearce, taking a tumbler of brandy and seltzer in his hand, and judging his time, on the pretence of lifting it to his lips, let it fall with a crash at the moment that Bertie struck his ball.

The start that Bertie involuntarily gave spoilt his stroke, and he missed his hazard. Then Pearce, who was profuse in his

apologies, carefully chalked his cue and began to play. Guy watched him narrowly, an ominous frown gathering on his brows as he saw the trap into which Bertie had fallen. But it required little knowledge of billiards to show that Pearce was really a most brilliant player, for he made stroke after stroke, "slow screws," "jennies," and "side twists," with a precision and exactness of strength that speedily scored, in a single break, the thirty points required, and made him the winner.

"Devilish hard luck, wasn't it?" said Bertie, pulling on his coat.

"I don't think luck had much to do with it," replied Guy, almost savagely. "Billiards are not your forte evidently—there's one great thing you haven't learnt yet."

"And what's that?"

"To know when you are over-matched."

"Pshaw! you argue from results. I suppose one of us was bound to win?"

"Exactly, if he tried—but that one wasn't you."

"Come on, you fellows!" cried Bentham, "let's get out of this atmosphere, it's—it's——"

"Infernal," laughed Guy, taking his arm

and going out. "Yes, by Jove! that's just what it is."

They all stood together on the steps of the Club, lighting their cigars.

"Strikes me that fellow Pearce is a 'leg,'" said Bentham, puffing with unusual vigour.

"'Leg be hanged! he's a tolerably good player, with an intolerably large amount of luck, that's all," answered Bertie.

His face looked wan and haggard in the morning light, now the bright flush had faded from it.

"Don't know, I'm sure," drawled Bentham; "if it's luck, seems to me he keeps a stock in reserve, and draws upon it just when he wants it. Three o'clock; I'm off to bed. Fare you well, you two."

Bertie turned to Guy, and hooking his arm into his, they strolled together towards Jermyn Street, where Bertie had rooms.

"Come along, old fellow, we've had enough of this jawing: I'm awfully knocked up, and I want to turn in."

"You are looking seedy, Bertie," responded Guy.

Bertie laughed. "It's hard work, this London life—this social treadmill; it's my first season, and I've not got into training

yet. But, Guy, I've not told you how glad I am to see you. Where do you hang out? Will you come to my rooms? I can give you a berth, I dare say."

"No, thank you; I've put up at Long's," replied Guy. "But I hope to see something of you all the same. I suppose you are knee-deep in engagements?"

"Hang the engagements! I can send them all to the wall," said Bertie. But beneath his tone of cordiality there was a certain restraint, a forced gaiety, which Guy, knowing all, thought arose from a desire not to let the conversation drop out of common-places into personalities. "To-morrow—ah, yes. I thought there was something—I've promised to drive down to Hurlingham with Leath for the pigeon-shooting. After that—let me see—will you come and dine with me, Guy?"

"All right, Bertie," said the other, heartily, "but don't throw over any better thing for me—there'll be plenty of time for me to see you."

"No. Come to-morrow. Here we are. You wont come in, then? By-bye, then; and—oh—I say, Guy, come at half-past six sharp, if you don't object to dining at such

an evening hour : I've got a box for the "Friday" to-morrow night, and the piece begins at eight."

"What's on there?" asked Guy, with world-be carelessness.

"On a new piece—*La Belle Sorcière*—a cross between a ballet and a drama," answered Bertie.

And then he turned to put the key into the door, and Guy wended his solitary way to Long's with a heavy heart, and his mind full of anxious forebodings. If Bertie had begun like this, what hope was there that he could be saved from all the dangers and pitfalls that would beset him on his way through life? Heedless, careless, and wilful Guy had known him to be; but utterly destitute of the common sense, the common prudence, to save himself from becoming the prey of a designing woman, he had not thought him.

Even if he could be saved from this scrape—and Guy could not believe that he had gone so far as to be beyond saving—what hope was there for him in the future?

So Guy argued, not knowing the particulars of the case, only the bare outlines; not knowing the power of the woman, who

according to Bentham's account, held Bertie in her chains; not knowing that the fascination of her beauty, together with the encouragement which she who appeared to scorn all other men, had for some reason of her own bestowed upon Bertie, was such as not one man in a hundred could have resisted.

Guy pitied Bertie's weakness; he shrank with horror from the thought of his name being coupled with this actress, not knowing how severely he had been tested, but resolved that his own strength, which had only been reserved because Bertie had no need of it, should come to his brother's aid, and that by some means, any means, he should be saved from this impending danger.



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